

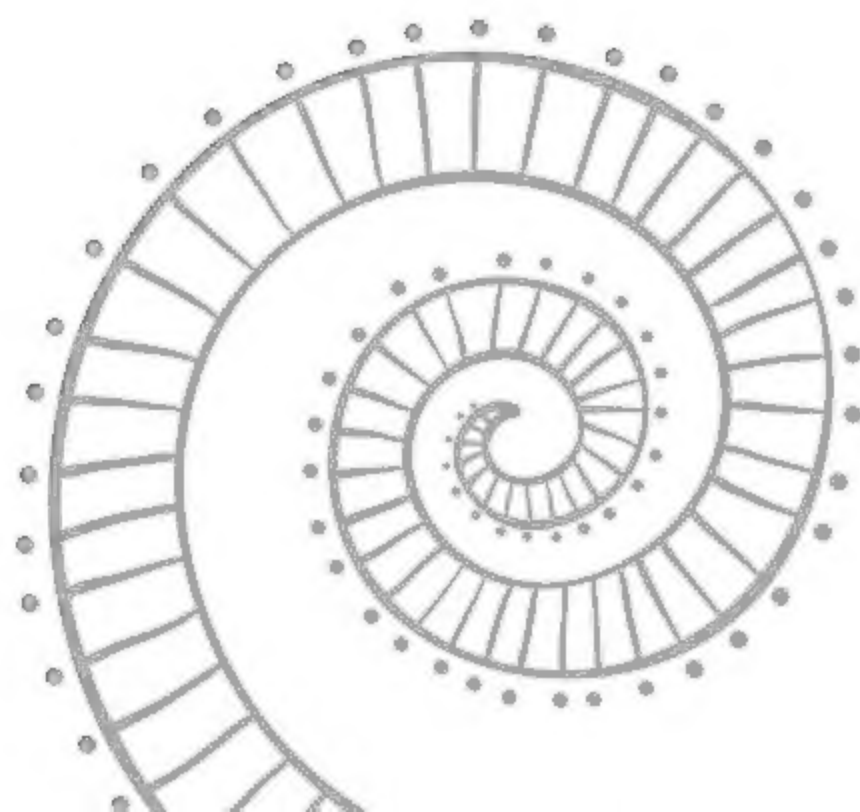
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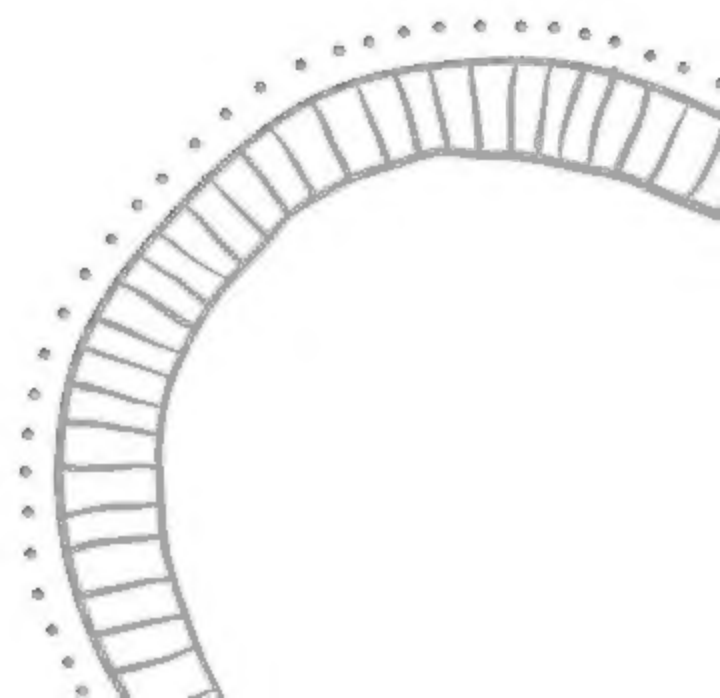
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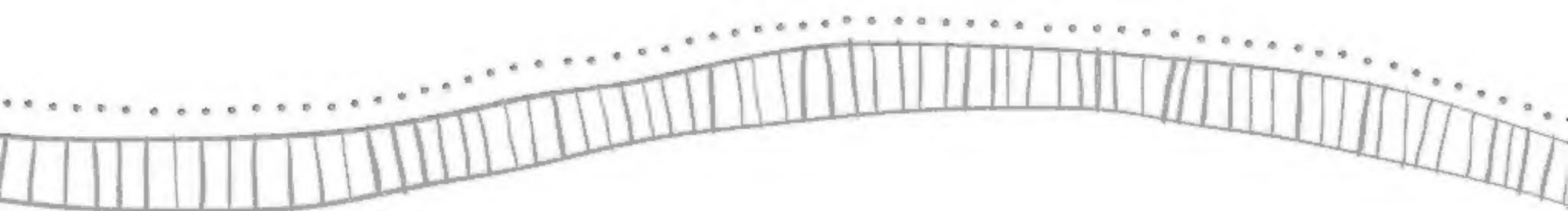
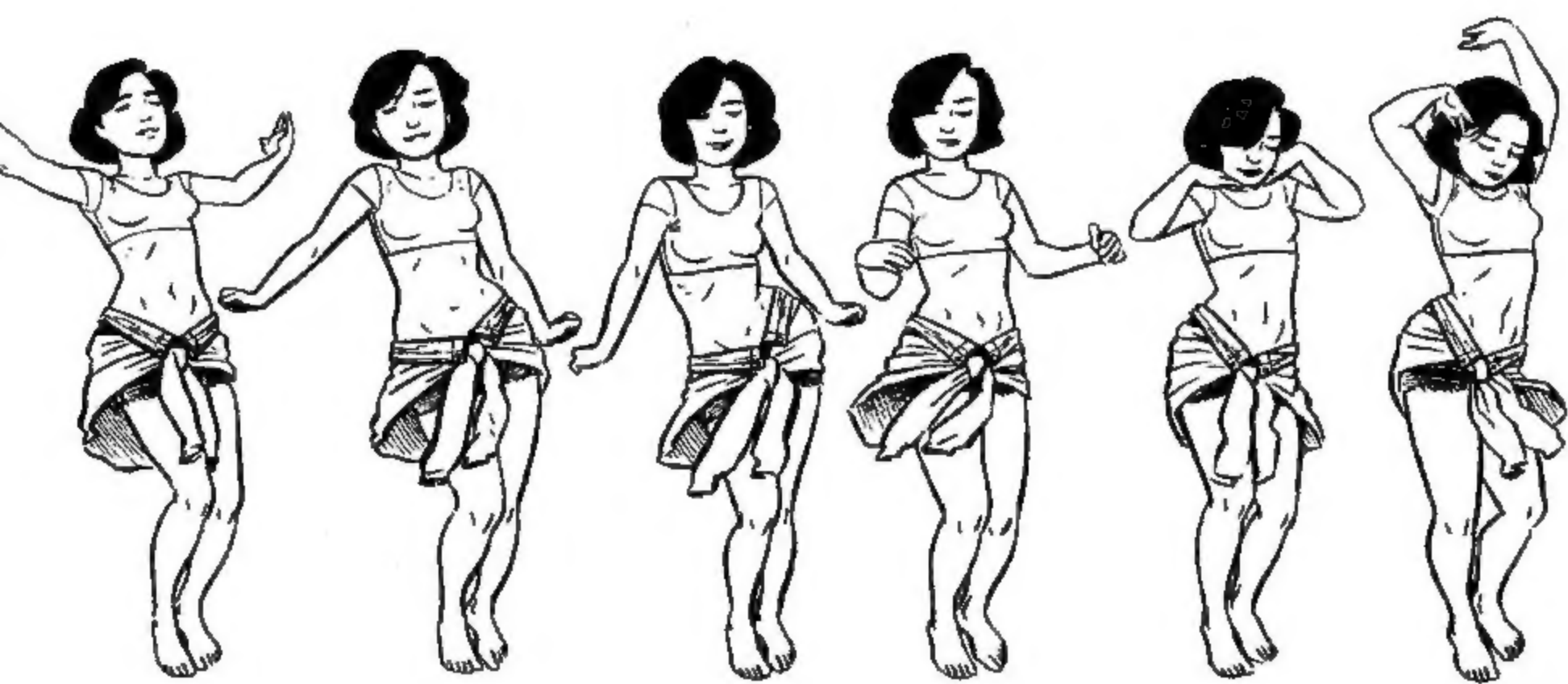


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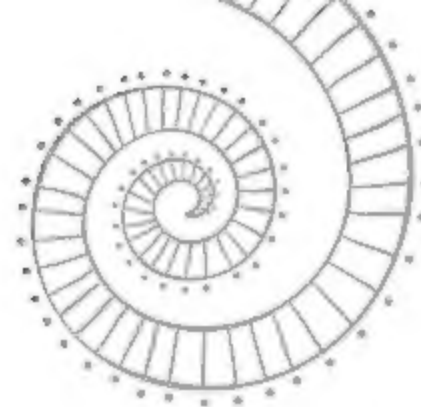




THE FINDER LIBRARY

CARLA SPEED McNEIL

VOLUME 2



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INTRODUCTION	8
DREAM SEQUENCE	11
MYSTERY DATE	187
THE RESCUERS	327
FIVE CRAZY WOMEN	471
NOTES	597
COVER GALLERY	637



INTRODUCTION

I feel like I've written this a dozen times or more over the last several years. I feel like I've spent a lot of the last decade trying to get people to pay attention to Carla Speed McNeil and *Finder*. Which has meant, at least in part, years of trying to drag Speed out into the light and make her wave her arms a bit so people could see her. Which she's not very good at. So I feel kind of vindicated that here *Finder* is again, in a nice new edition paid for by other people.

The thing is that, given the above, you may not be completely sure what you're holding right now. So here I am again, waving my arms on behalf of *Finder*. I may never get tired of it.

Speed has described *Finder*—when pinned to the wall for a way to describe it at all—as “aboriginal SF.” When she thinks I'm not looking, she will also call it “fantasy.” And, honestly, speculative fiction has gotten so fuzzy around the edges in the last forty years that it's sometimes gotten absurdly hard to differentiate some of it from fantasy or any other goddamn thing.

Science fiction is one of those things that's, on closer examination of the genre, actually kind of slippery to define. You can look for the *novum*, the new thing—*Finder* certainly has those. But I can name you a bunch of other books that are inarguably considered science fiction that don't have them. Fantasy tends not to have the *novum*, that thing that is speculative—except, of course, when it does.

I've found few working definitions that seem to really encompass the form. But let me try this one on you, from the SF writer Frederik Pohl: “Science fiction is a way of thinking about things.”

Finder is a way of thinking about things.

Finder takes an aborigine, a native from a place where there is still contact with sand and soil and the wind and the world, and places him in a series of future urban societies. Not as an avatar of the arch, doomed John the Savage from Huxley's *Brave New World*, nor as some noble primitive, nor even as some naive plainsman lost in the big cities. The complex, charming, slightly callous Jaeger comes from a society just as ordered and ruthless as the ones he now walks through. And because of that there is a sense that the earthy Jaeger, in his travels, is in fact experiencing versions of what his tribal society may grow into. That *Finder* is speculation on the themes of tribe and family. A way of thinking about where we, barely out of the woods ourselves, are going.

Jaeger, the Finder—a hunter/tracker—can move from, if you like, the court to the country, as he wishes and as circumstances dictate. The people he interacts with in the cities, by and large, cannot. Escape from the modern world, and its impossibility, is a constant theme. Jaeger can go where he likes, but he cannot escape himself—his role as a tribal sin-eater, and the other destructive

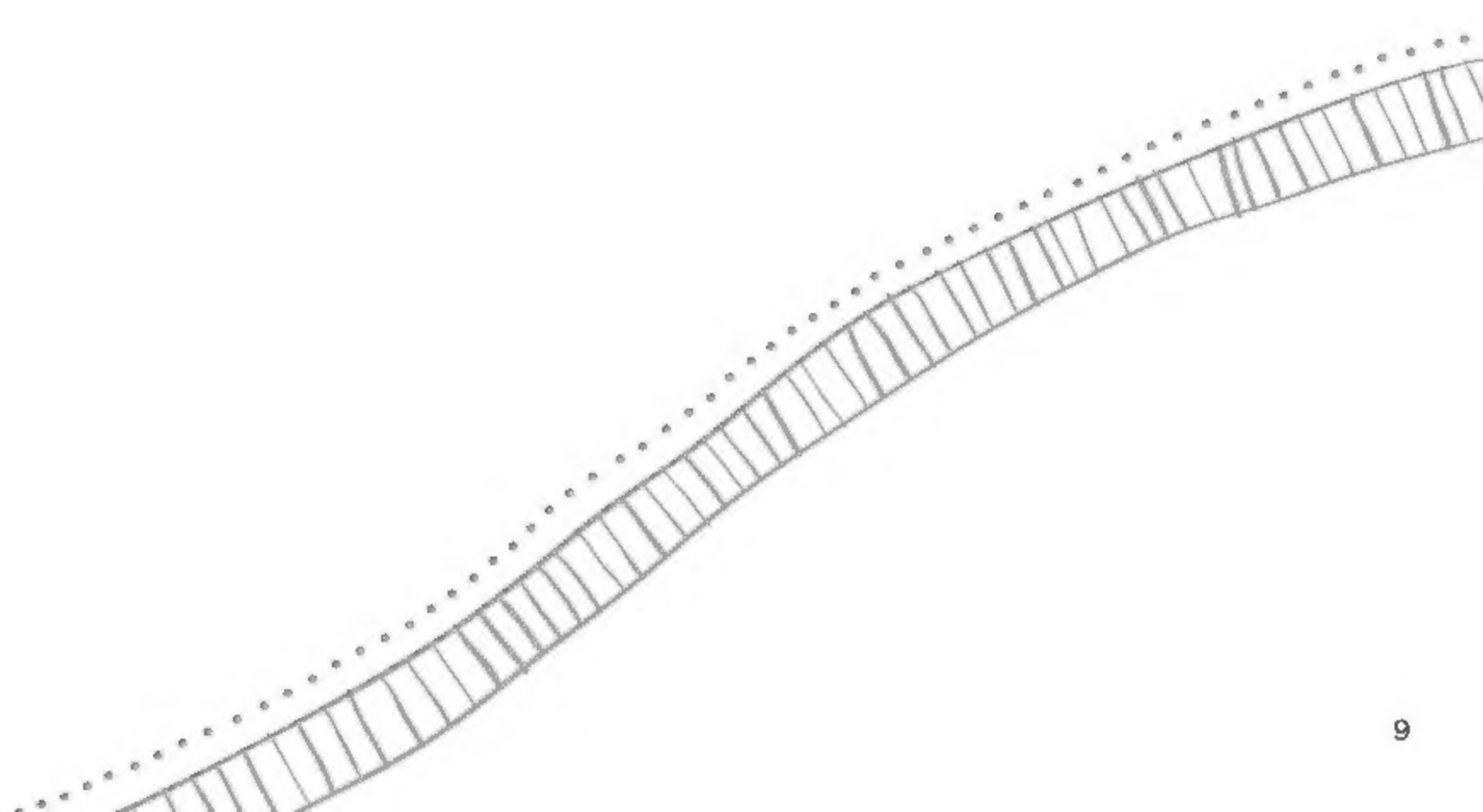
compulsions I won't mention here. He finds people, and he will be a scapegoat for them. But he's almost entirely lost himself, and the people he meets don't want to be found.

But the tone, for all that, isn't a note of black depression. There is joy in this work, and people who find ways to live. And there is shagging. There is an awful lot of shagging.

The real joys of the work, I leave you to discover for yourself. Carla's deft, warm, clever dialogue, and the gorgeous and intelligent art. Her capability as a cartoonist sneaks up on you: so organic and easy does her line appear that it can take a while to realize what she's really doing with body language, the way people wear clothes, operate their environment, the sheer complexity of facial expressions that she seems to capture so effortlessly. There's hard thought behind every single panel, a devotion to the full spectrum of storytelling that is rare and lovely.

These books are among my treasured favorites of the last ten years. I hope you love this one as much as I do.

—Warren Ellis
A hotel room in Berlin
February 2011



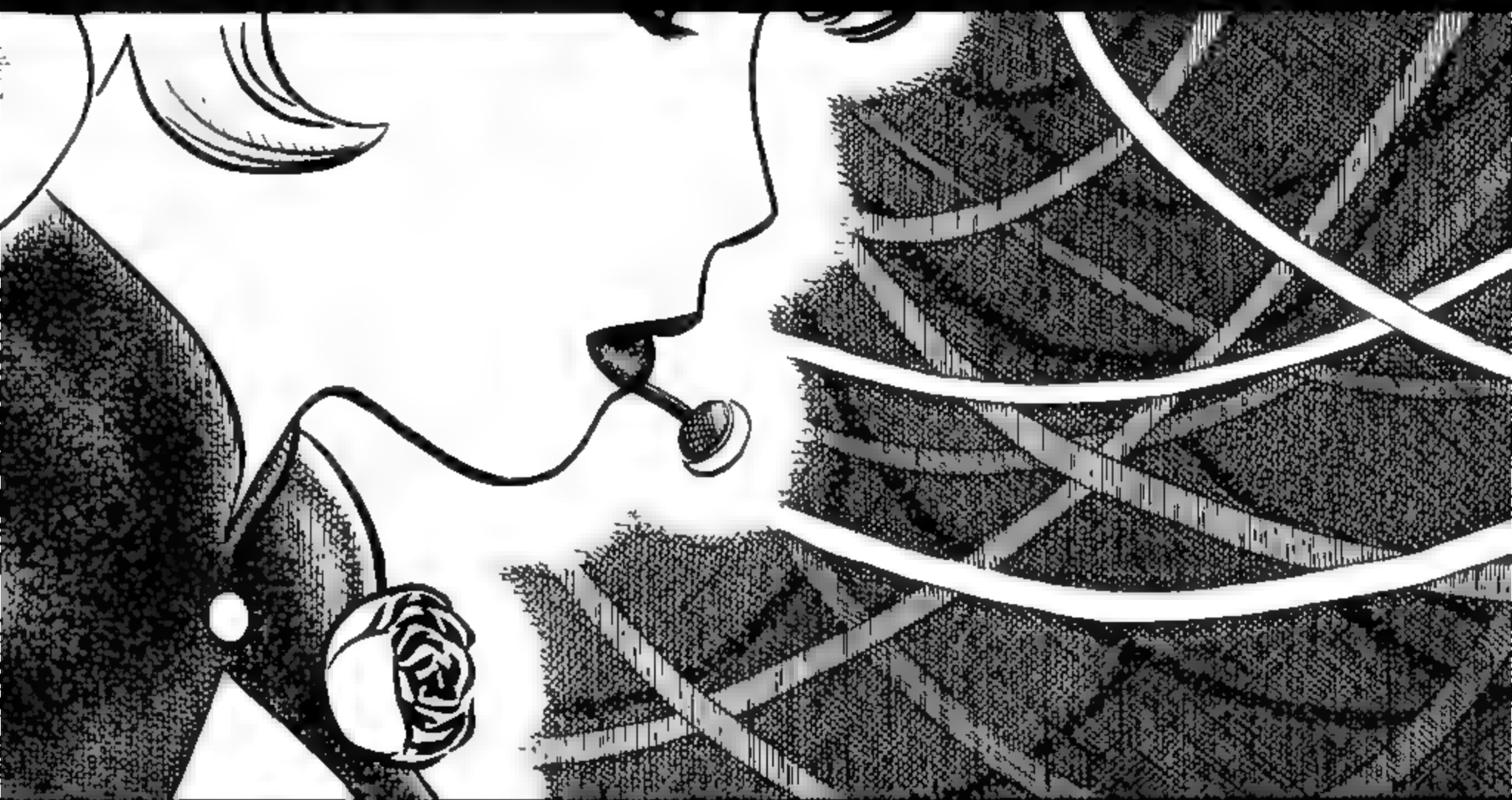
DREAM SEQUENCE



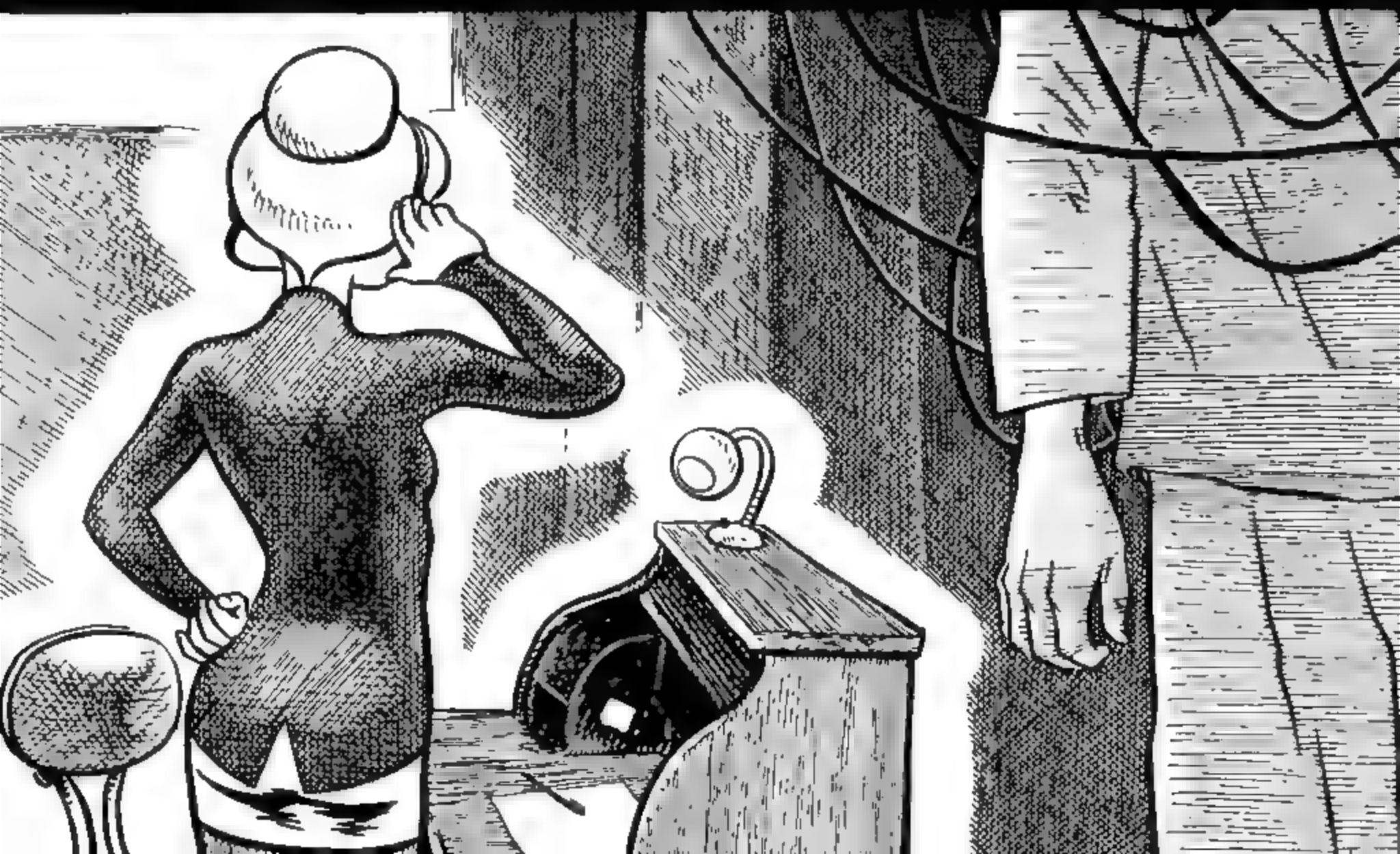


CHAPTER ONE

"I'M SORRY, SIR,



MAGRI WHITE





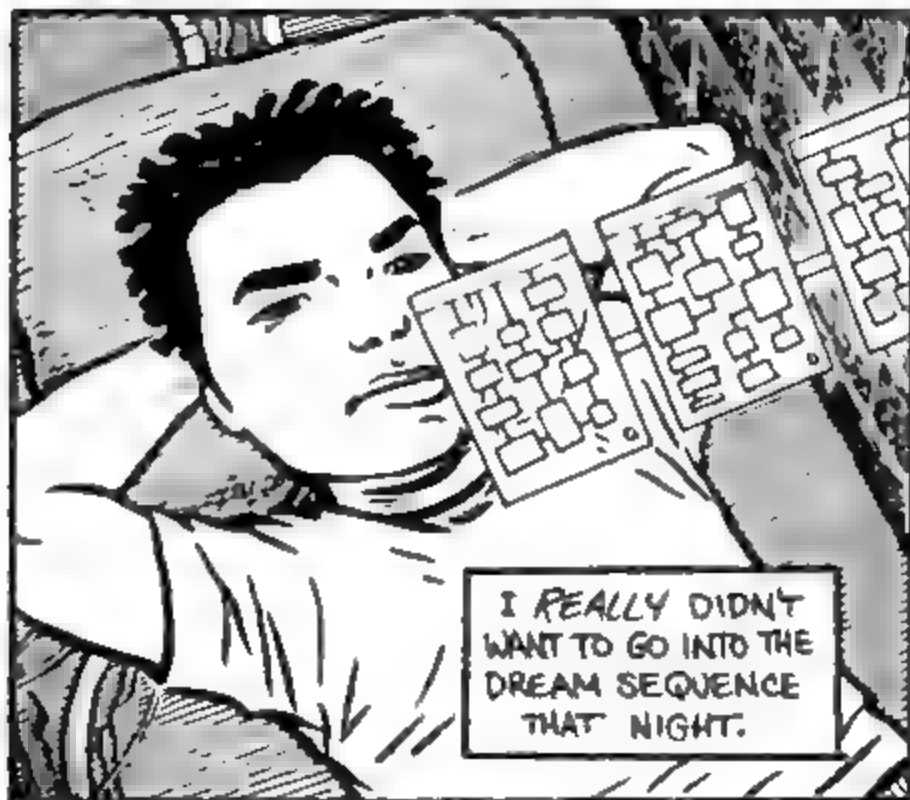
IS ELSEWHERE TODAY.



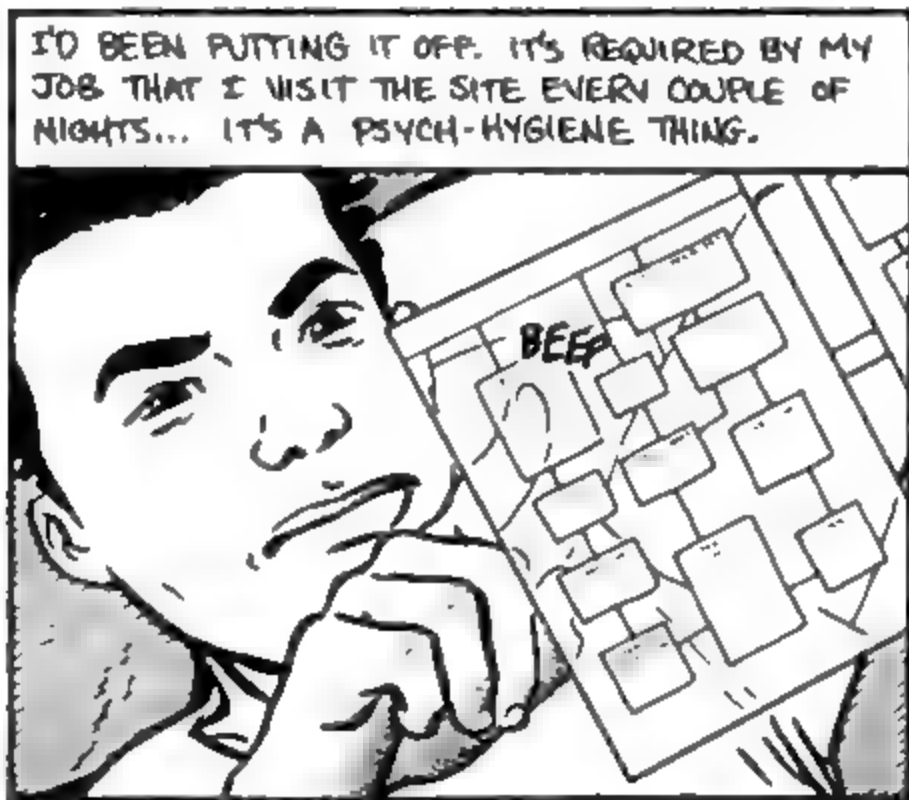
"MAY I TAKE A MESSAGE...?"



THAT'S ME. I'M AYO. HI.



I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO GO INTO THE DREAM SEQUENCE THAT NIGHT.



I'D BEEN PUTTING IT OFF. IT'S REQUIRED BY MY JOB THAT I VISIT THE SITE EVERY COUPLE OF NIGHTS... IT'S A PSYCH-HYGIENE THING.



WHAT IT DOES IS, IT TAKES THE EVENTS OF THE LAST DAY

(OR WEEK, OR YEAR, DEPENDING ON HOW LONG YOU STAY IN)

AND TURNS THEM ALL UPSIDE DOWNWAYS. IT GETS ALL POETIC TRYING TO TRANSLATE ORDINARY DUH LIFE INTO SOMETHING LIKE A DREAM.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER.

IN RED AND YELLOW LEATHER. IN ALL KINDS OF WEATHER

RED LEATHER
YELLA LEATHA
RED YELLA
YELLA
LYELLA

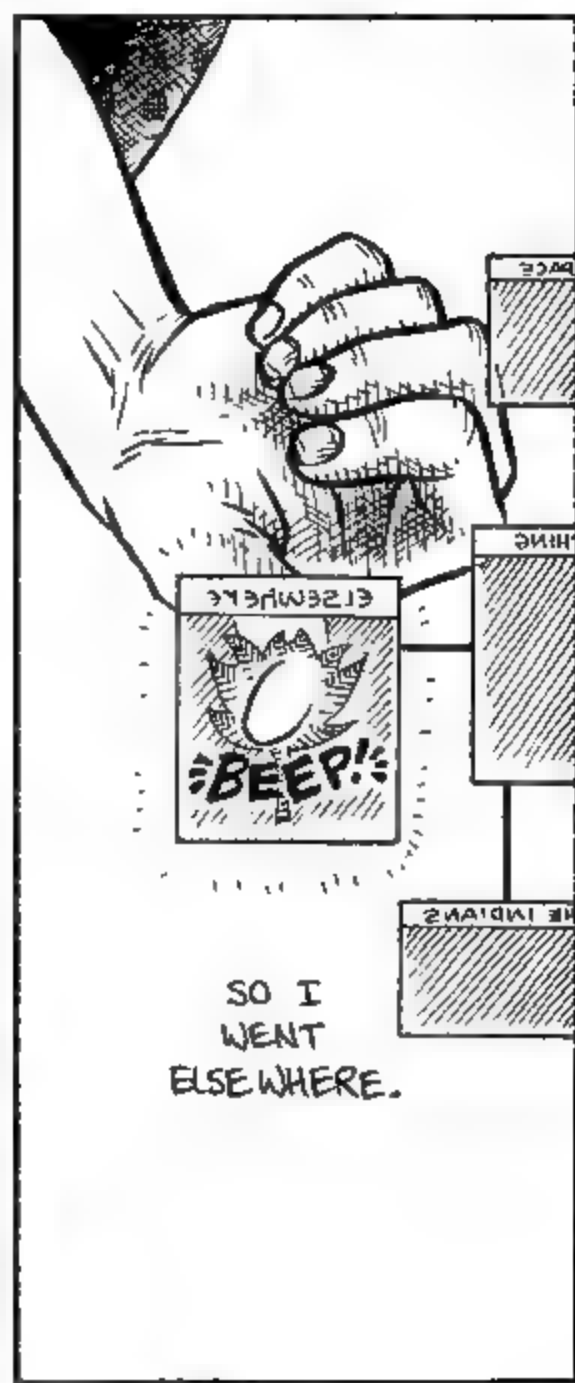
(LAST TIME IT WAS ALL THESE WEIRD BIRDS. DUSTY, DRY FEATHERS-- MADE ME SNEEZE.)



THEN IT GIVES YOU A BIG OL' ANALYSIS OF THE DREAM IT JUST CONCOCTED AND WHAT IT THINKS THE DREAM MEANS, SO YOU CAN BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW IT ALL RELATES TO THE REAL WORLD.

DUDE! I THINK I GOT SOMEBODY ELSE'S DREAM BY ACCIDENT!

I'VE HAD GREATER INSIGHTS OUT OF FORTUNE COOKIES.



ELSEWHERE IS A WHOLE WORLD.

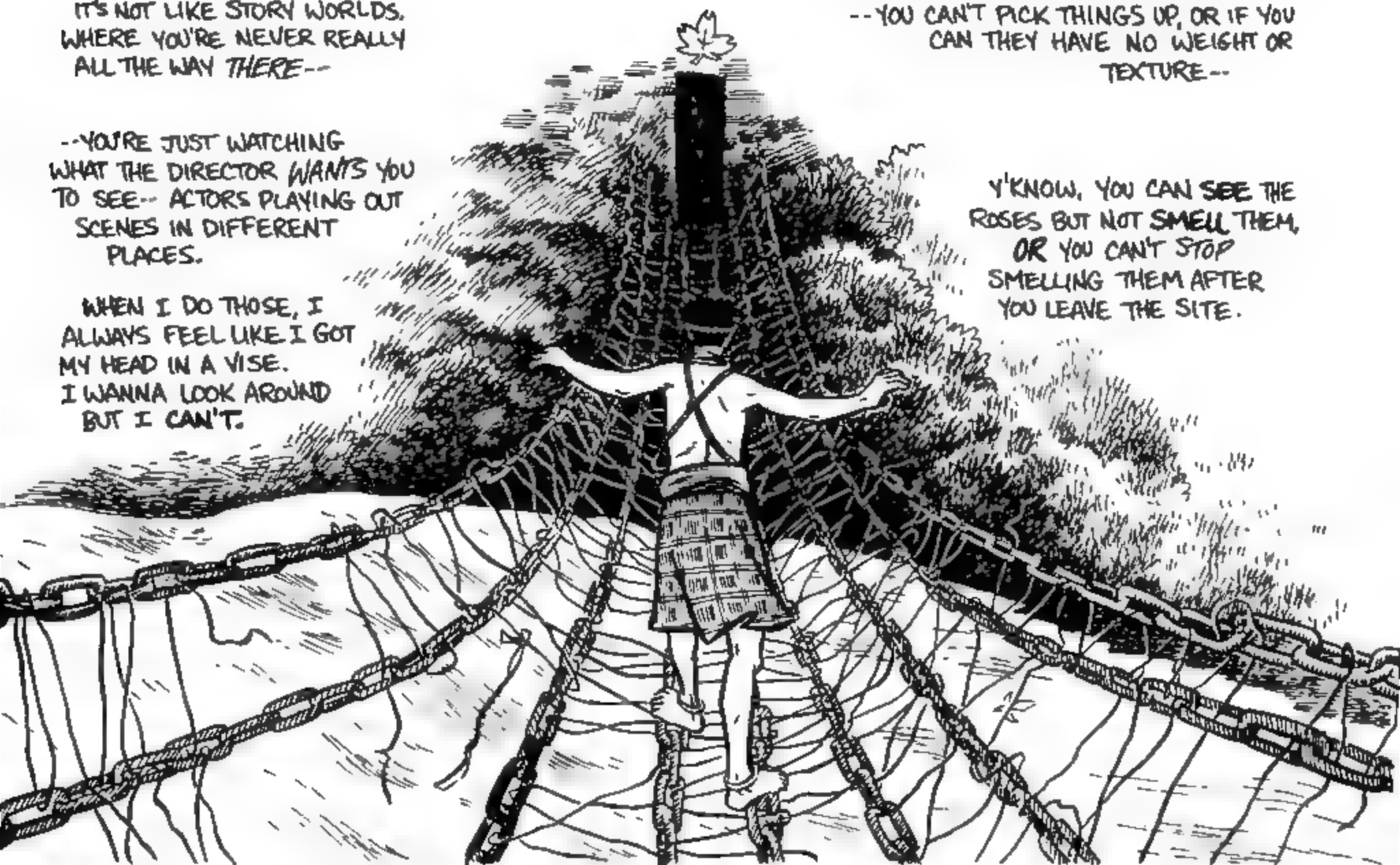
IT'S NOT LIKE STORY WORLDS,
WHERE YOU'RE NEVER REALLY
ALL THE WAY THERE--

--YOU'RE JUST WATCHING
WHAT THE DIRECTOR WANTS YOU
TO SEE-- ACTORS PLAYING OUT
SCENES IN DIFFERENT
PLACES.

WHEN I DO THOSE, I
ALWAYS FEEL LIKE I GOT
MY HEAD IN A VISE.
I WANNA LOOK AROUND
BUT I CAN'T.

IT'S NOT LIKE OTHER SITES ON THE WEB,
WHERE YOU NEVER "GET" EVERYTHING
-- YOU CAN'T PICK THINGS UP, OR IF YOU
CAN THEY HAVE NO WEIGHT OR
TEXTURE--

Y'KNOW, YOU CAN SEE THE
ROSES BUT NOT SMELL THEM,
OR YOU CAN'T STOP
SMELLING THEM AFTER
YOU LEAVE THE SITE.



NO. WHAT MAKES ELSEWHERE UNIQUE IS THAT IT ALL
COMES THROUGH. ALL THE SENSES, WITH NO WEIRD
DROPOUTS OR ARTIFACTS. YOU CAN **FEEL** THE STONE
UNDER YOUR FEET, THE WIND FLOWING OVER YOU;
BIRDS' WINGS HUM, THE DRY GRASS RUSTLES...

YOU'RE
THERE.

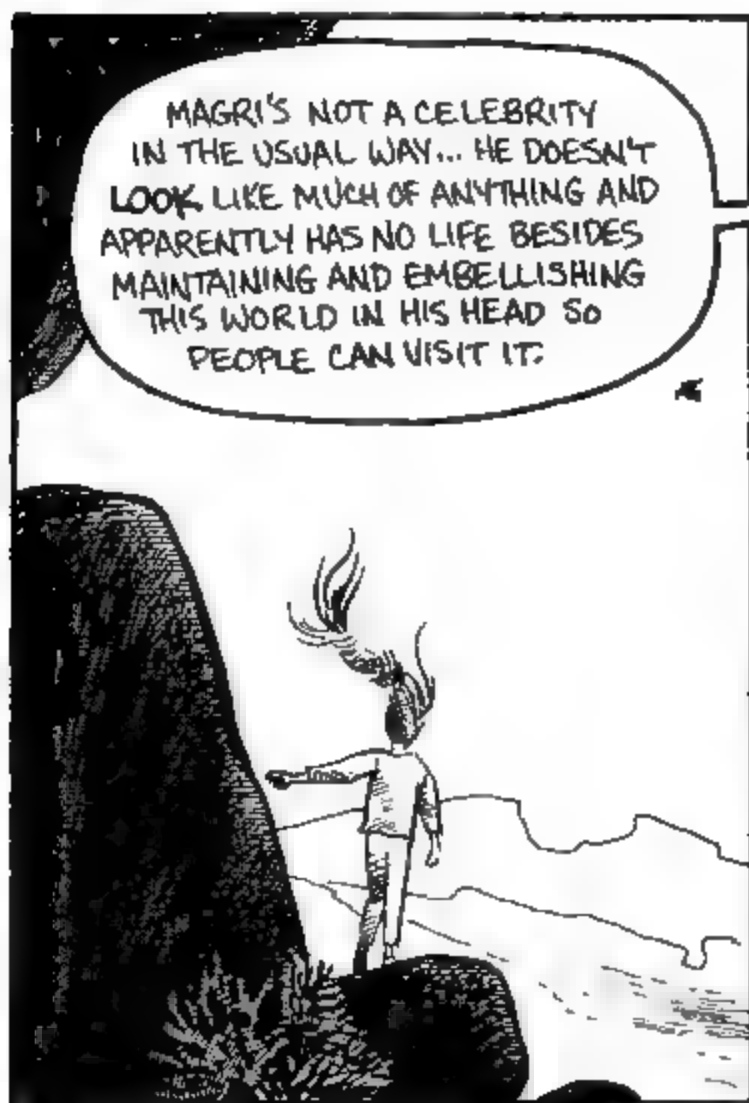


AND ELSEWHERE DOESN'T SIT ON
SOME MAINFRAME, TENDED ONLY
BY OTHER COMPUTERS, BUILT BY
COMMITTEE AND OVERDESIGNED.

ELSEWHERE EXISTS ONLY IN
THE HEAD OF ITS CREATOR.

MAGRI
WHITE.





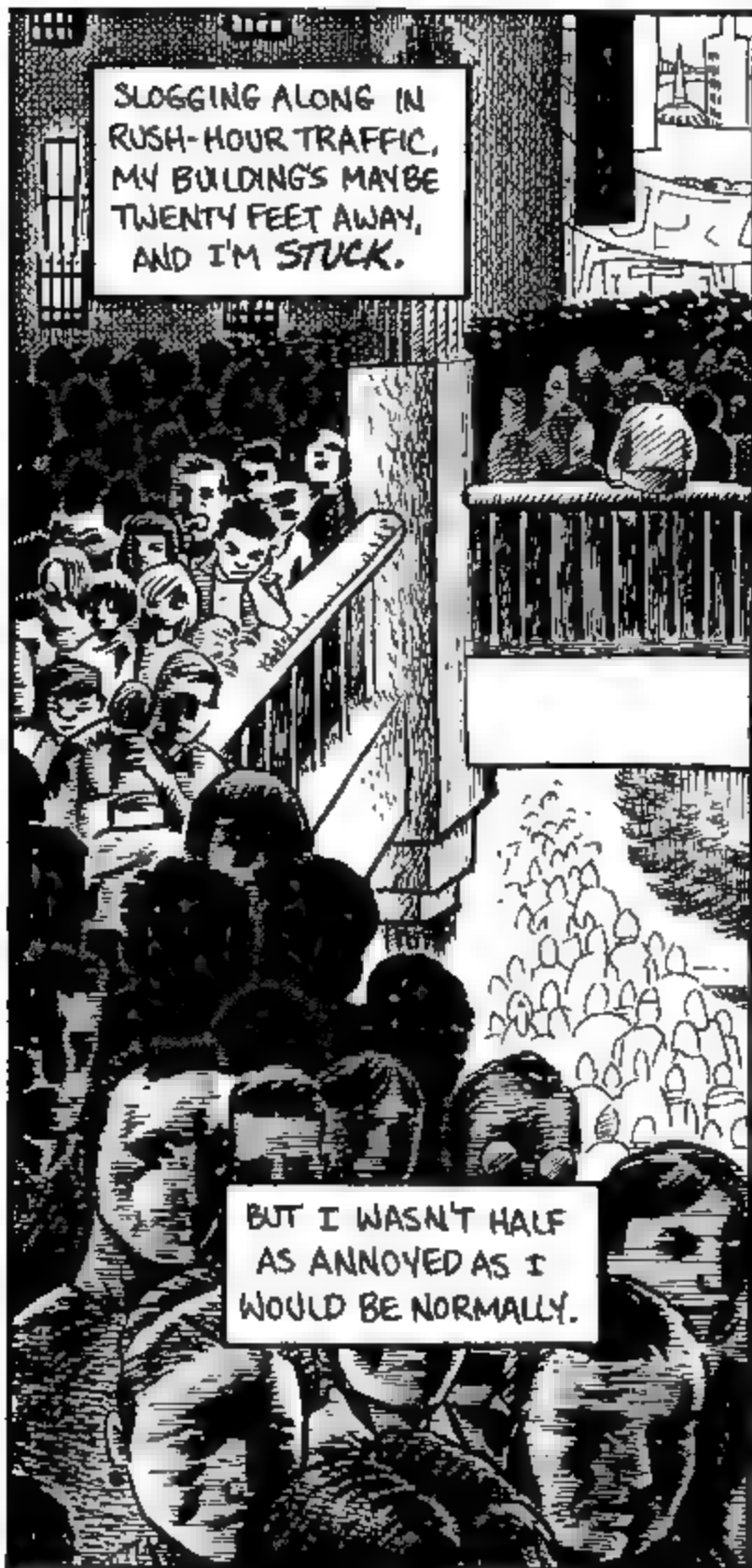
MAGRI'S NOT A CELEBRITY IN THE USUAL WAY... HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH OF ANYTHING AND APPARENTLY HAS NO LIFE BESIDES MAINTAINING AND EMBELLISHING THIS WORLD IN HIS HEAD SO PEOPLE CAN VISIT IT.



I WOULD GIVE UP MY FEET TO BE HIM.

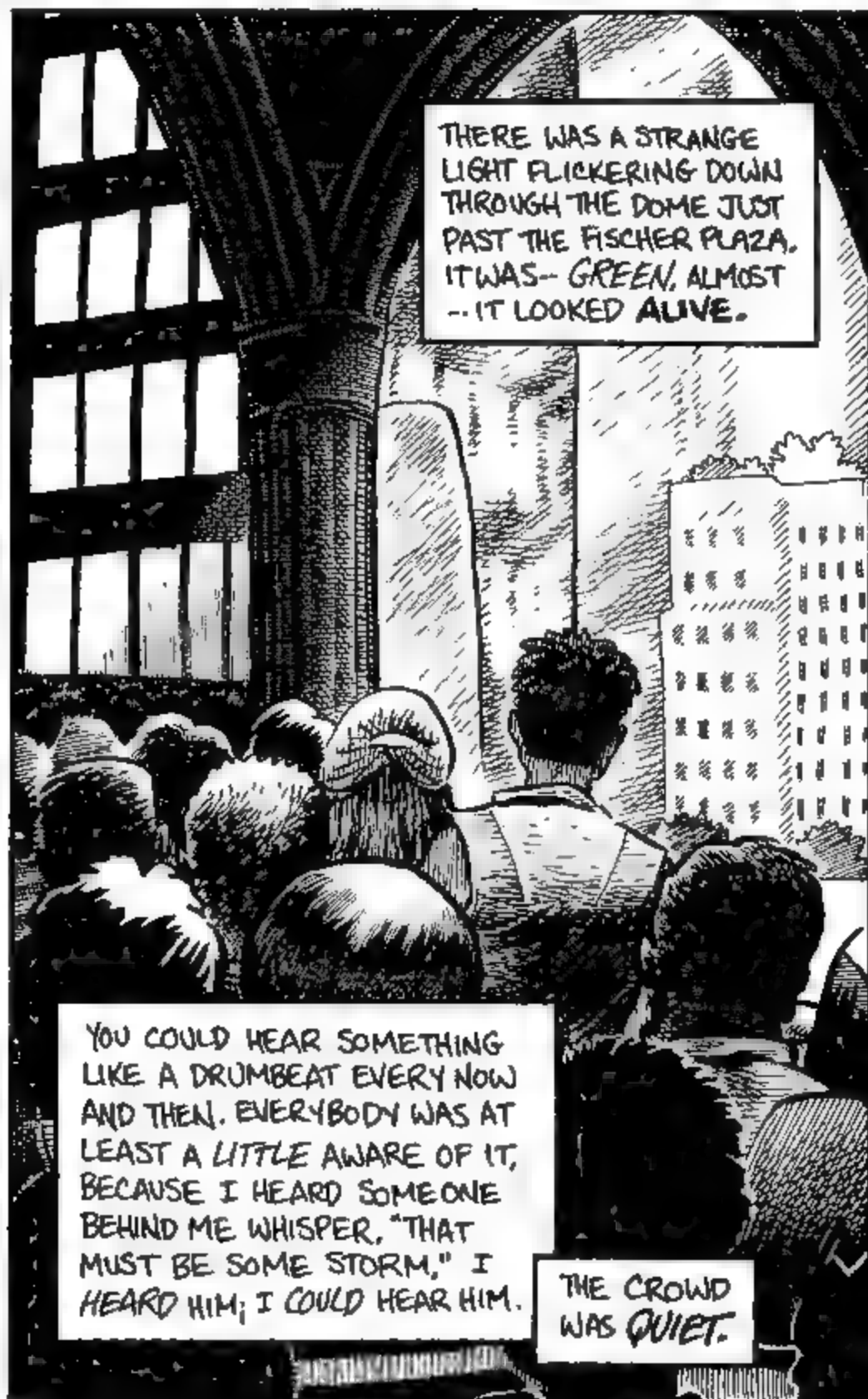


I SAW HIM ONCE, IN PERSON. OUTSIDE, I MEAN.



SLOGGING ALONG IN RUSH-HOUR TRAFFIC, MY BUILDING'S MAYBE TWENTY FEET AWAY, AND I'M STUCK.

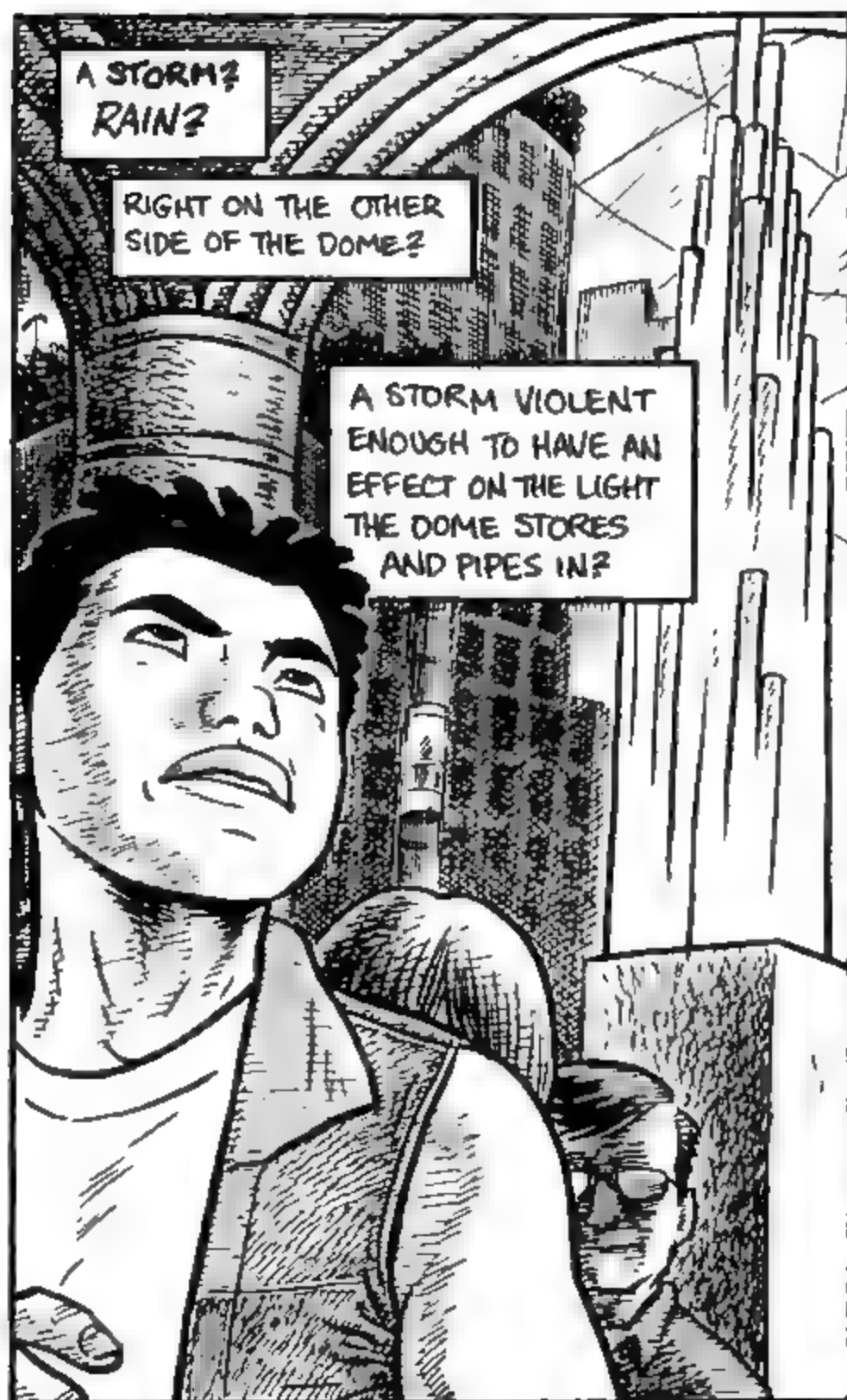
BUT I WASN'T HALF AS ANNOYED AS I WOULD BE NORMALLY.



THERE WAS A STRANGE LIGHT FLICKERING DOWN THROUGH THE DOME JUST PAST THE FISCHER PLAZA. IT WAS-- GREEN, ALMOST --IT LOOKED ALIVE.

YOU COULD HEAR SOMETHING LIKE A DRUMBEAT EVERY NOW AND THEN. EVERYBODY WAS AT LEAST A LITTLE AWARE OF IT, BECAUSE I HEARD SOMEONE BEHIND ME WHISPER, "THAT MUST BE SOME STORM," I HEARD HIM; I COULD HEAR HIM.

THE CROWD WAS QUIET.



A STORM?
RAIN?

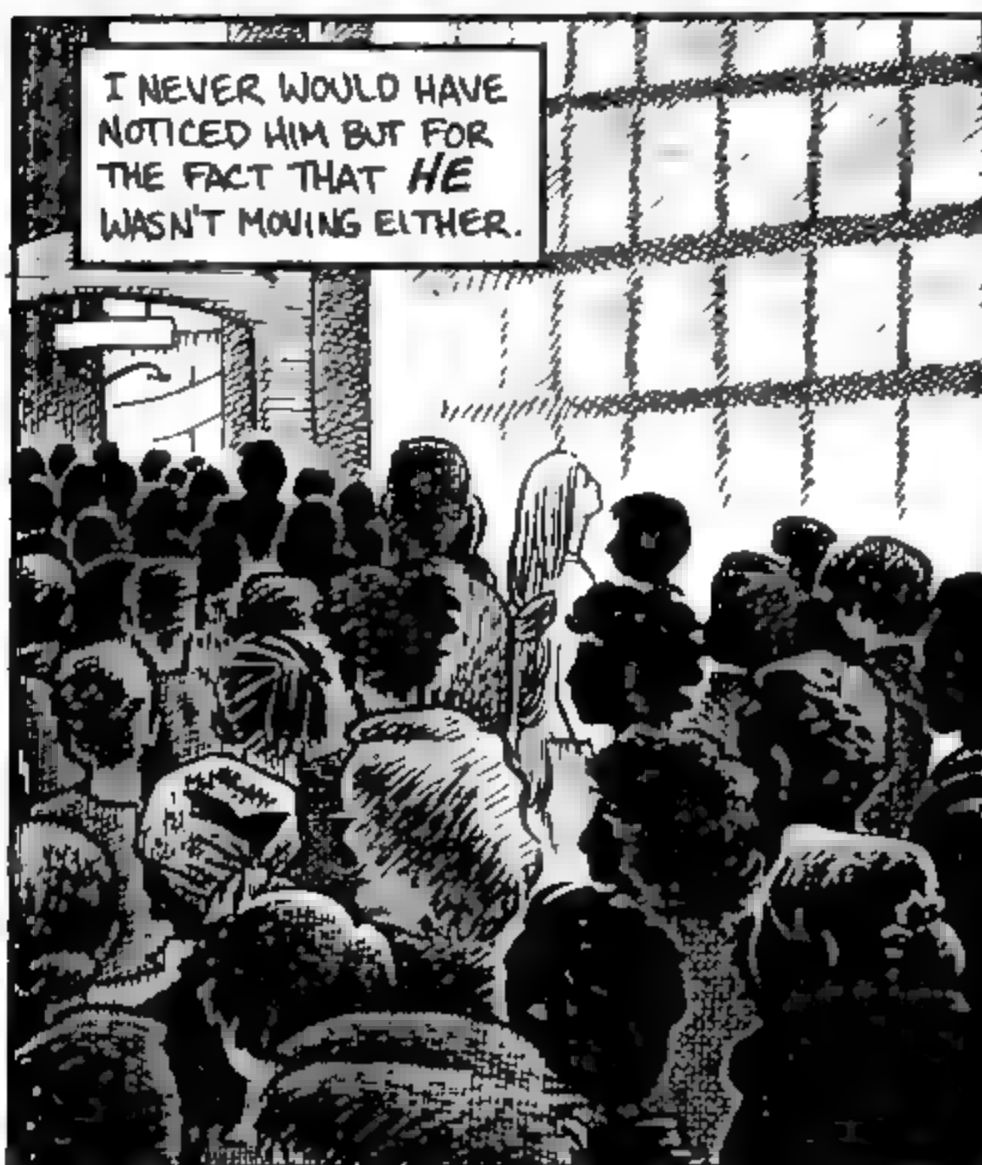
RIGHT ON THE OTHER
SIDE OF THE DOME?

A STORM VIOLENT
ENOUGH TO HAVE AN
EFFECT ON THE LIGHT
THE DOME STORES
AND PIPES IN?



THE GREEN LIGHT WAS
BEAUTIFUL AND I WANTED
TO LOOK AT IT A WHILE.

THE TRAFFIC STARTED
MOVING AGAIN, BUT I
STAYED PUT.

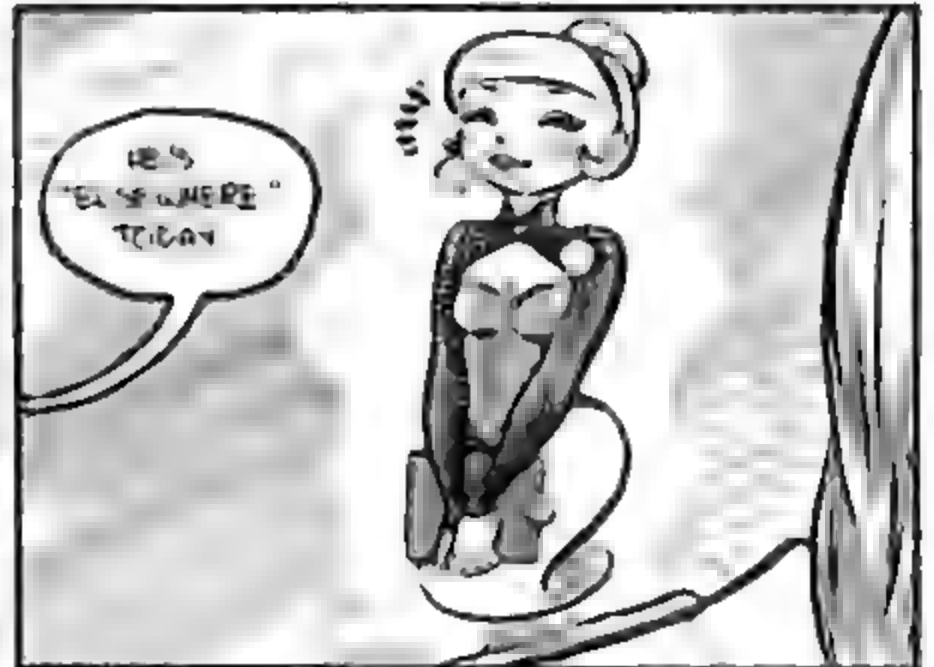


I NEVER WOULD HAVE
NOTICED HIM BUT FOR
THE FACT THAT **HE**
WASN'T MOVING EITHER.



MAGRI
WHITE.

HE WAS LOOKING AT THE
LIGHT TOO. HE WAS JUST
ANOTHER SKINNY WHITE
GUY FROM SYLVAN CLAN,
BUT ONLY MAGRI WOULD...



THAT NIGHT THE
GREEN STORM LIGHT
WAS ELSEWHERE
TOO.

WITH IT CAME
HEALED THUNDERHEADS,
A COOL SWEET WIND
THAT SMELLED OF
WET GRASS.
LIGHTNING STROBING
IN THE DISTANCE,
LINGERING HEAT IN
WARM STONE,
CICADAS DRIVING
IN THE TREES.

MOST OF THESE
THINGS I'VE NEVER
SEEN IN REAL LIFE.
ONLY ON SCREENS.

OR ELSEWHERE

I'D DIE
WITHOUT IT.



WHAT I DO FOR A LIVING DOESN'T REALLY REQUIRE SUCH SOPHISTICATED VIRTUAL-REALITY INTERFACES. HELL, NOBODY NEEDS A JACK THIS FANCY.



BUT THE SMART EMPLOYER KNOWS THERE'S NO HOOK LIKE IT. THEN GIVE US STATE-OF-THE-ART CONNECTIONS, MAINTAIN AND UPGRADE THEM SCRUPULOUSLY, AND WE ARE THEIRS, MAN.

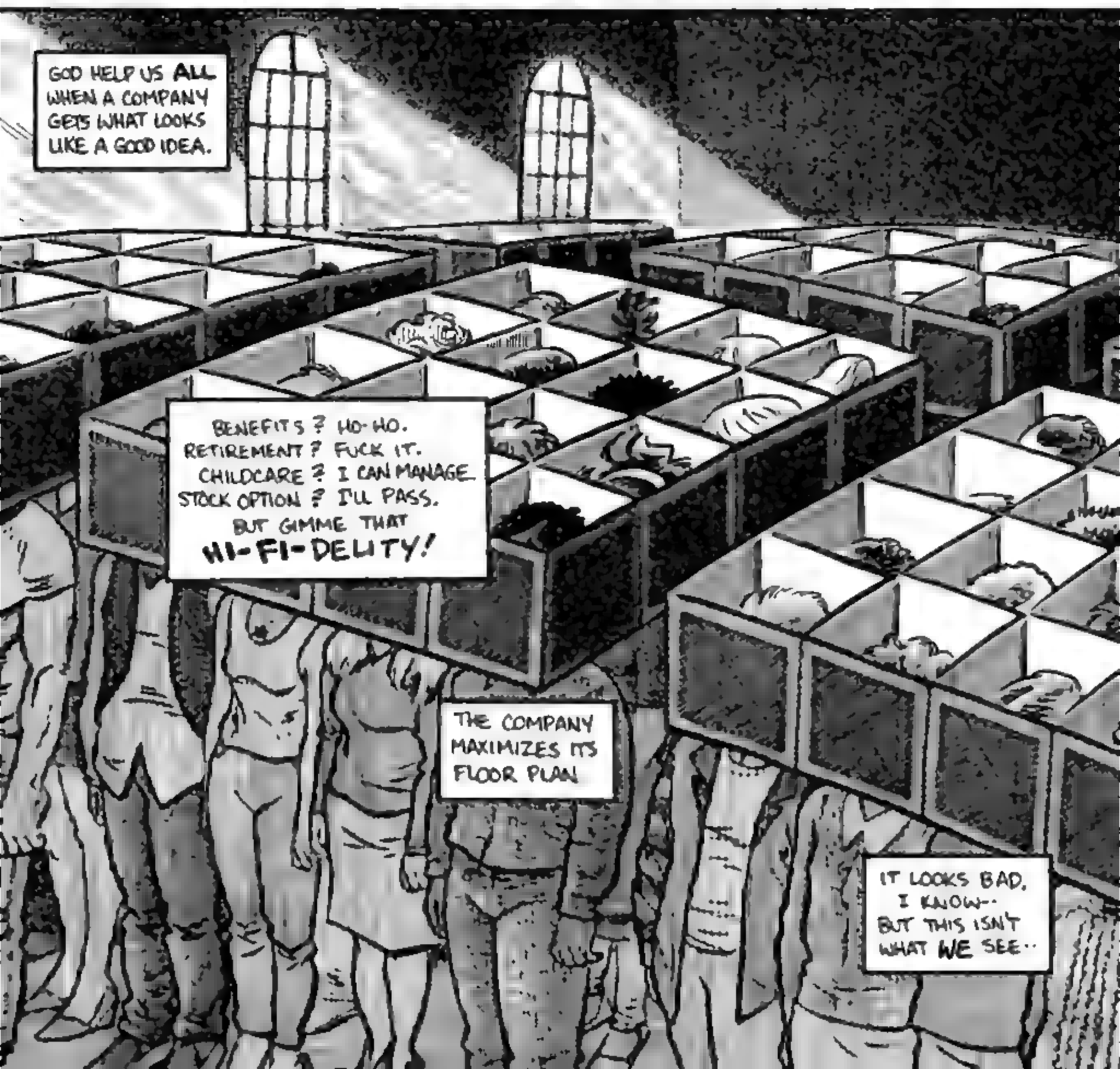


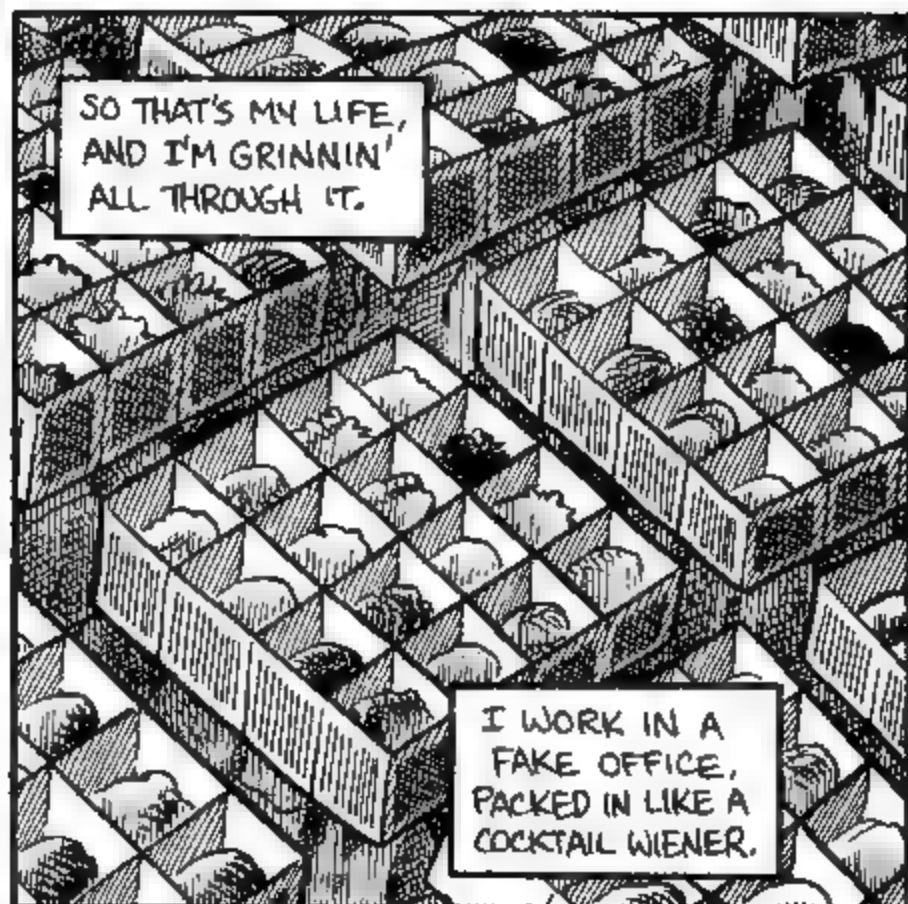
GOD HELP US ALL WHEN A COMPANY GETS WHAT LOOKS LIKE A GOOD IDEA.

BENEFITS ? HO-HO.
RETIREMENT ? FUCK IT.
CHILDCARE ? I CAN MANAGE.
STOCK OPTION ? I'LL PASS.
BUT GIMME THAT
HI-FI-DELITY!

THE COMPANY
MAXIMIZES ITS
FLOOR PLAN

IT LOOKS BAD,
I KNOW--
BUT THIS ISN'T
WHAT WE SEE..





THEN I GO TO BED--



PLUGGED INTO THE
FANCIEST SYSTEM
ON THE MARKET, I
GO EVERYWHERE

I DO
EVERYTHING

MEET MY FRIENDS
GOD KNOWS WHERE
THEY REALLY LIVE
WHO CARES

GET TRASHED AND
NEVER GET
HUNG OVER

FUCK LIKE WEASELS AND
NO NASTY SURPRISES
THERE EITHER

EVERYTHING

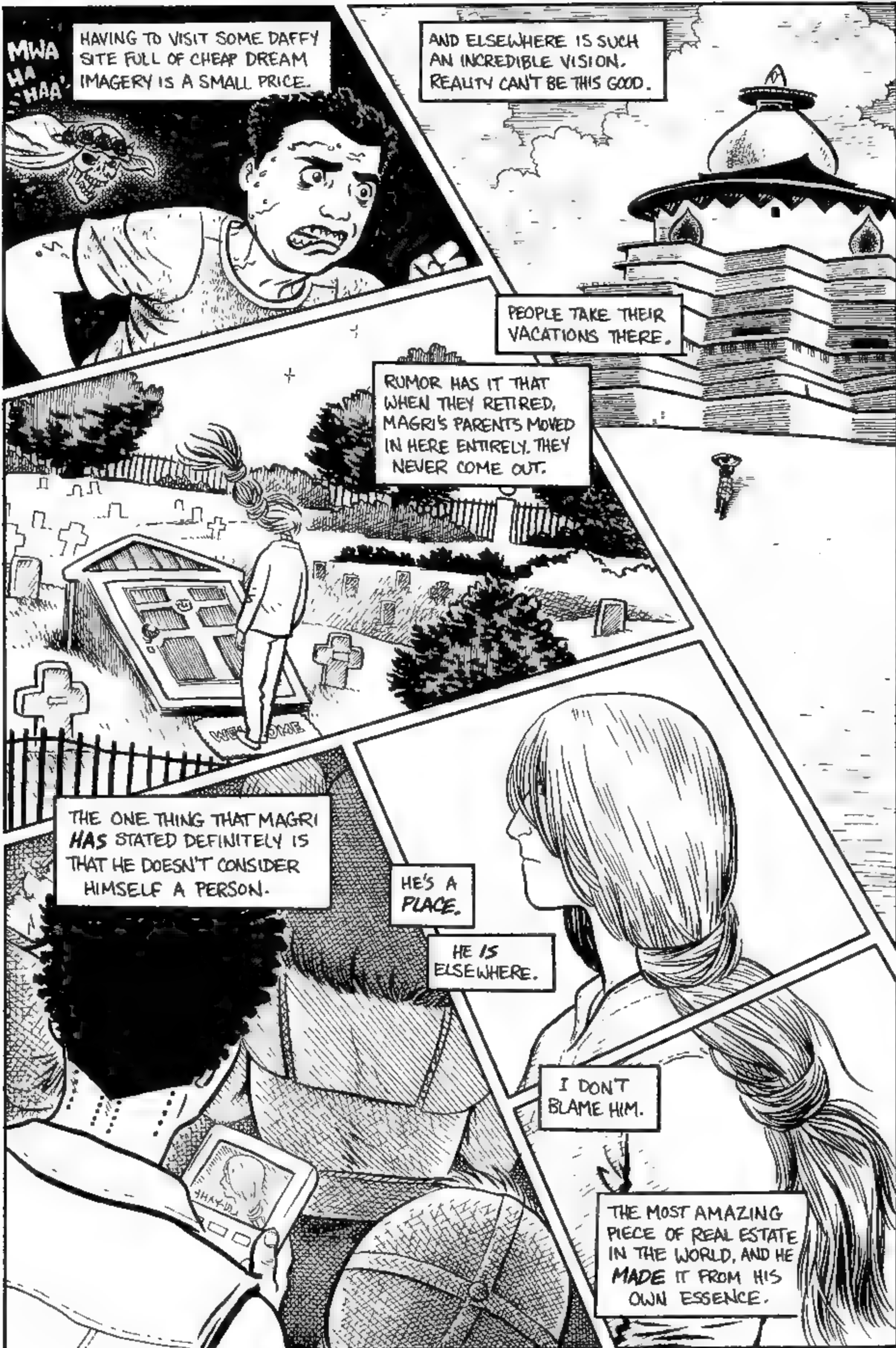
I OWN
NOTHING

I HAVE
NOTHING

EVERYTHING.

HEE
HEE

ELC(N)213



MWA
HA
HAA

HAVING TO VISIT SOME DAFFY
SITE FULL OF CHEAP DREAM
IMAGERY IS A SMALL PRICE.

AND ELSEWHERE IS SUCH
AN INCREDIBLE VISION.
REALITY CAN'T BE THIS GOOD.

PEOPLE TAKE THEIR
VACATIONS THERE.

RUMOR HAS IT THAT
WHEN THEY RETIRED,
MAGRI'S PARENTS MOVED
IN HERE ENTIRELY. THEY
NEVER COME OUT.

THE ONE THING THAT MAGRI
HAS STATED DEFINITELY IS
THAT HE DOESN'T CONSIDER
HIMSELF A PERSON.

HE'S A
PLACE.

HE IS
ELSEWHERE.

I DON'T
BLAME HIM.

THE MOST AMAZING
PIECE OF REAL ESTATE
IN THE WORLD, AND HE
MADE IT FROM HIS
OWN ESSENCE.

I GOTTA ADMIT, THOUGH--
THE DREAM SEQUENCE IS
PRETTY SILLY BUT IT REALLY
DOES HELP. TWO HOURS OF
BEING CHASED BY FLYING
SKULLS IN BRIDAL VEILS OR
CLOWNS WITH ERECTIONS
AND I MIGHT FIND MYSELF
DREAMING SOMETHING THAT
ACTUALLY REFLECTS REALITY.
LIKE LAST TIME.



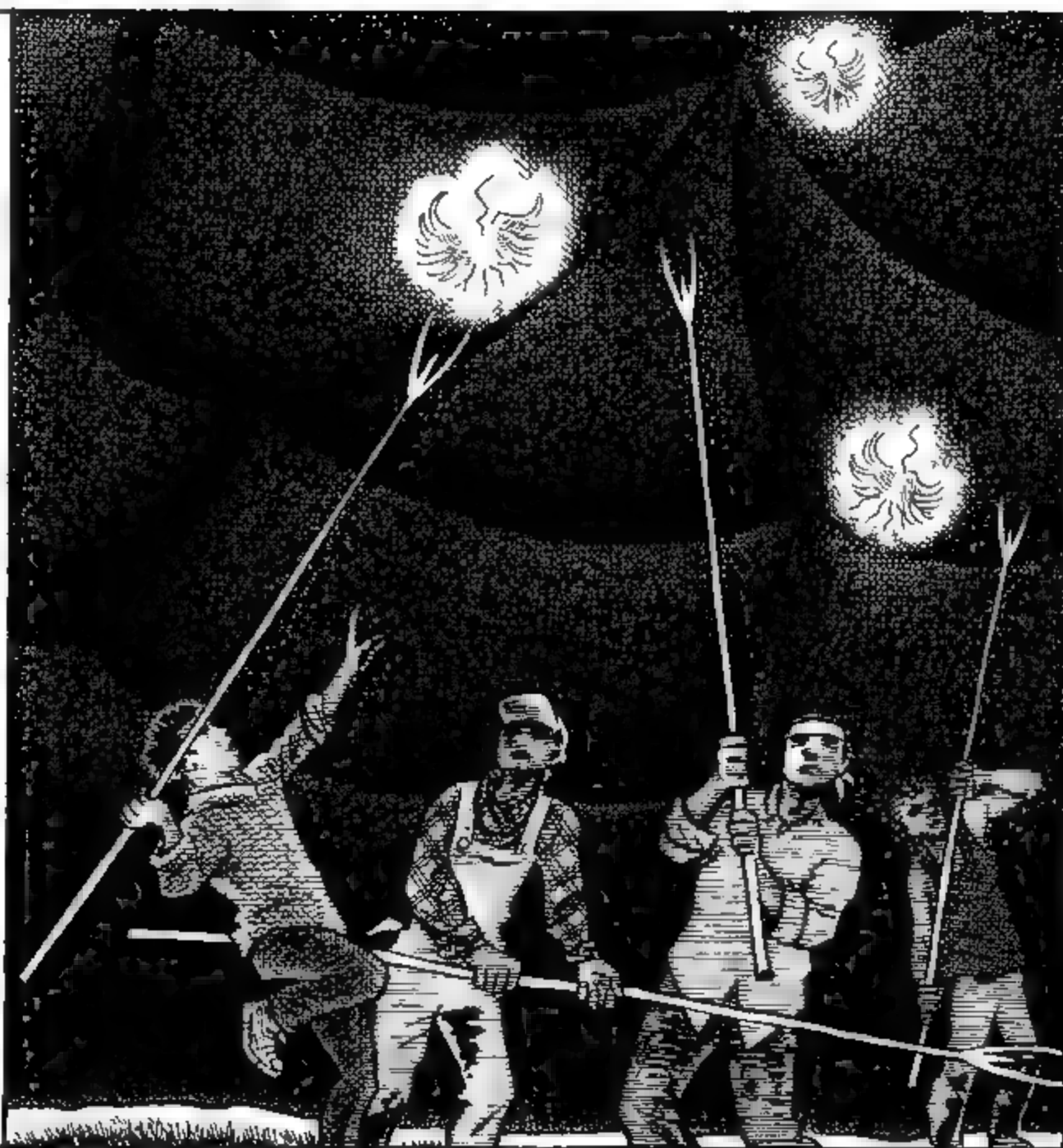
I DREAMED I WAS IN THIS
BIG, HOT, DARK CIRCUS-TENT
THING. IT STANK OF HOT
CANVAS. OUTSIDE WERE
HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE BUT
ALL I COULD SEE OF THEM
WAS THEIR FEET AND THE
CANVAS WHEN THEY
BRUSHED AGAINST IT.

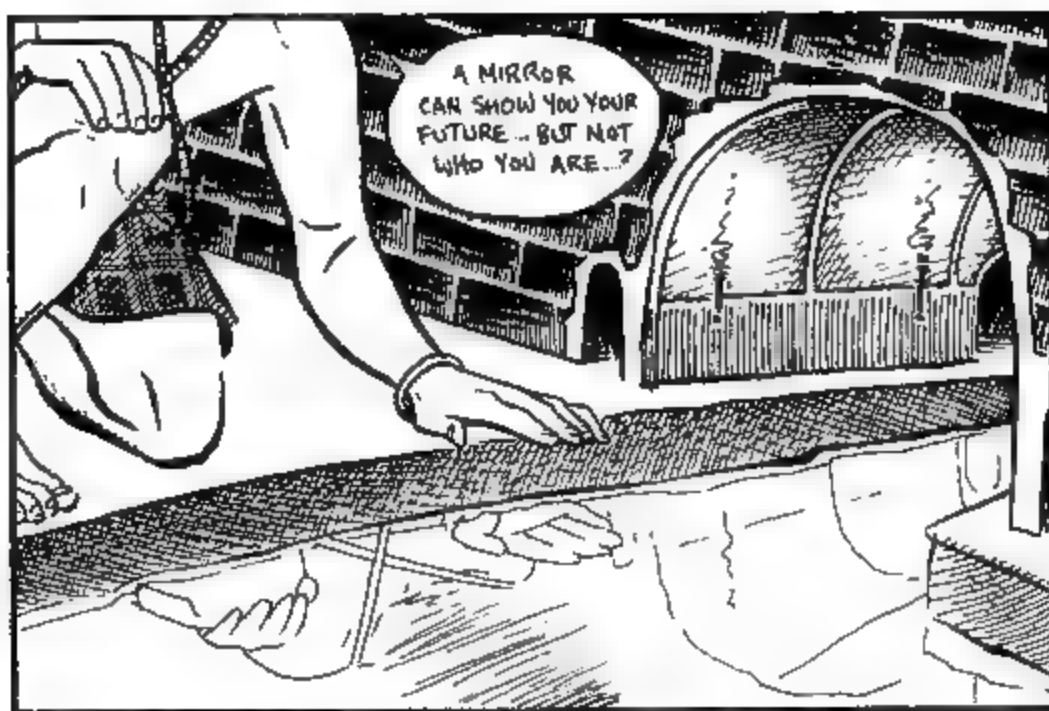


INSIDE, WE WERE ALL
THESE BIG ROUSTABOUT
KINDA GUYS. WE HAD
LONG POLES WITH SHARP
FORKS ON THE END, AND
WE WERE TRYING TO
CATCH THESE BRIGHTLY
COLORED BIRDS.
OR MAYBE THEY WERE
BUGS, LIKE ENORMOUS
LIGHTNING BUGS.

I DIDN'T KNOW IF THE
BIRD-BUGS WOULD DIE
IF I SPEARED 'EM, BUT
IT DIDN'T SEEM TO
MATTER, AND IN DREAMS
YOU DON'T CHOOSE. I WAS
THINKING HOW WEIRD IT
IS THAT YOU CAN KNOW
YOU'RE BEING MANIP-
ULATED AND IT'LL STILL
WORK ON YOU, WHEN
THE DREAM ENDED.

(I DIDN'T GET A FORTUNE-
COOKIE ANALYSIS OF THAT ONE.)





A MIRROR
CAN SHOW YOU YOUR
FUTURE... BUT NOT
WHO YOU ARE...

IN ELSEWHERE,
YOU CAN NEVER SEE
YOUR OWN FACE.
REFLECTIONS ARE
ALWAYS DISTORTED.
YOU COULD BE
ANYBODY.
(AND YOU OFTEN ARE.)

FOR EXAMPLE-- THE
PEOPLE YOU MEET--
WHO KNOWS WHO
THEY REALLY ARE?

WHEN YOU RUN INTO OTHER
PEOPLE, THERE'S NO FUMBLING;
YOU SAY WHAT POPS INTO YOUR
HEAD, YOU DO WHAT YOU'RE
COMPELLED TO DO. YOU
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT.

LIKE IN DREAMS.
YOU'RE PLAYING A
ROLE, A PART IN A
STORY ALREADY
WRITTEN, BUT WITH
NO SENSE OF
READING FROM A
SCRIPT.



YOU WALK ON,
SAY YOUR LINES,
THEN YOU'RE
FREE TO GO.

SHEEE!

BUT YOU KNOW-- ONE OF LAST YEAR'S ELSEWHERE-BASED
NOVELS HAD ME IN IT! HELL, I WAS THE CENTRAL METAPHOR!

I HAD NO IDEA, AT THE TIME, WHY I LIKED STANDING
ON THAT ROCK LOOKING AT THE STARS SO MUCH.

WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO
THAT? OR WAS IT MY
IDEA, AND THE AUTHOR
JUST WROTE IT IN?

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT
OTHER PEOPLE MAY SEE,
WHAT THEY TAKE AWAY
WITH THEM. BUT IT'S OKAY.
THEY DON'T KNOW THE STORY
I'M LIVING EITHER.



AND THEN
TODAY

I MET
A

GUY?

MONSTER

--SOMEBODY--

REALLY TORE
MY SHIT UP.

I HADN'T GONE
THROUGH THE
DREAM SEQUENCE
FOR TOO LONG.

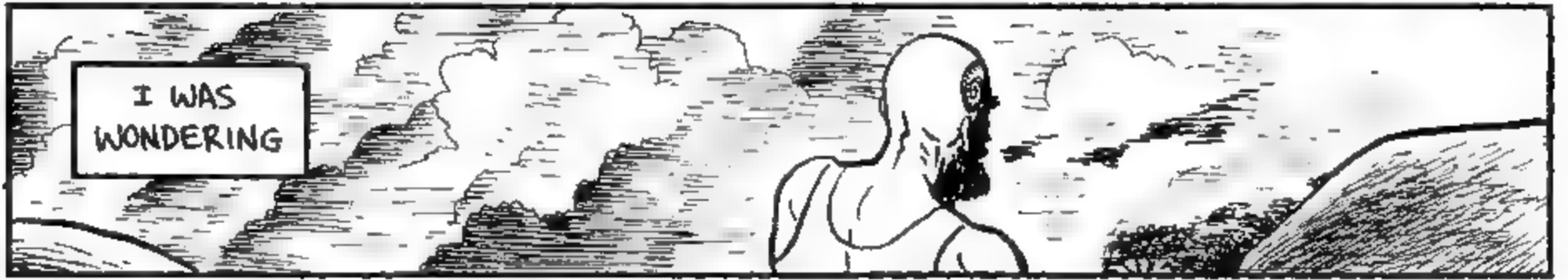
THAT'S WHAT IT IS...
A BAD DREAM
LEAKING THROUGH
INTO... REALITY?

NOTHING BAD'S
SUPPOSED TO
HAPPEN TO YOU
IN ELSEWHERE

SO



THE FORTUNE
COOKIES ALL
TALK ABOUT
REBIRTH
CHANGE
TRANSITION
ALL THAT
KINDA HAPPY
HORSESHIT
SO



I WAS
WONDERING



WHAT THIS
IMAGERY-

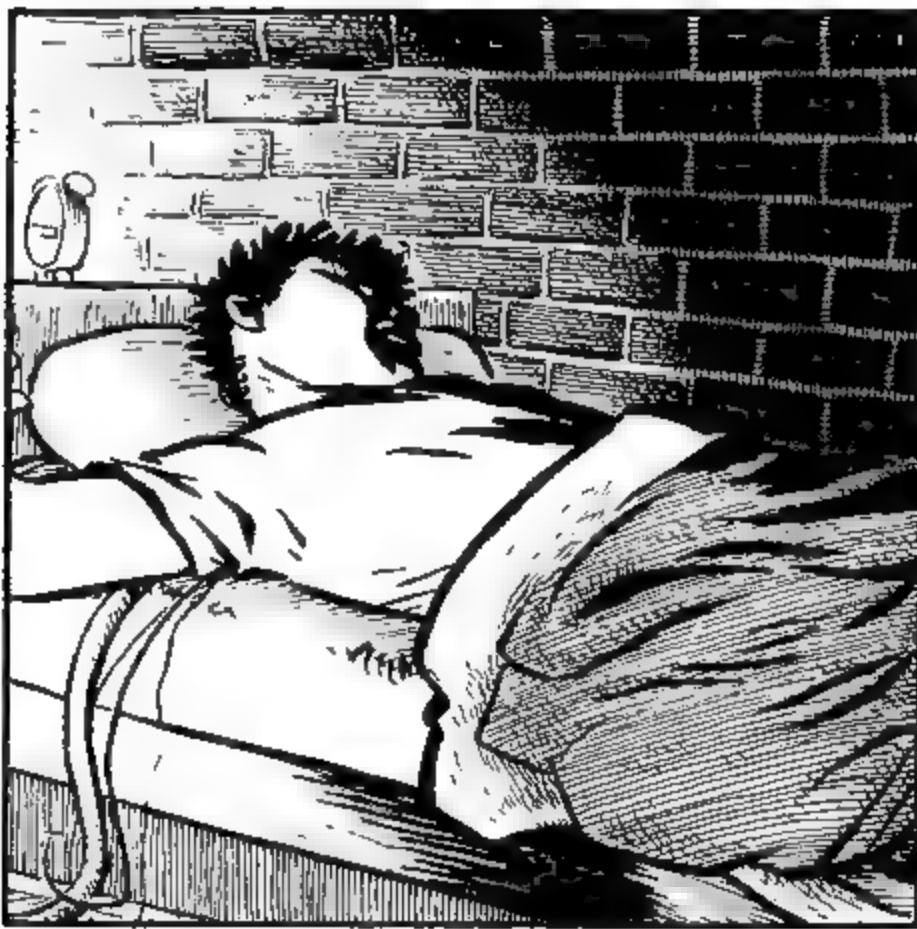


REALLY
REPRESENTED



WHEN

I








CHAPTER TWO





MY HEAD IS FULL OF OLD
FIGHTS, INCOMPLETE AND
ENDLESSLY REPEATED.

JUST GRAY HAZE
THAT NEEDS TO BE
CLEARED AWAY.



WHEN I MAKE
A NEW PLACE,
I ALWAYS BEGIN
WITH BOTH LIGHT
AND DARKNESS.

THAT'S FOR
BALANCE.

IT'S ALL BUT
IMPOSSIBLE TO
ADD MORE OF
EITHER IF I
DON'T START OFF
WITH BOTH.

SOON I'VE GOT A PLEASANT LITTLE BOWL
OF TWILIGHT, A TREE-LINED CRATER
VALLEY, WITH A BONFIRE.

THIS IRRITATING POP SONG I'VE HEARD
TWENTY TIMES TODAY SLOWS INTO
SOMETHING MORE SINUOUS...THE WHINY
VOCALIST FADES INTO A WHISPERY PIPE
THAT RAISES THE HAIRS ON MY WRISTS.

IT'S FLAT ELECTRONIC
RHYTHM SLIDES INTO
SOMETHING NOT QUITE
A DRUM, NOT QUITE A
BELL. A STEADY CLICK-
CLICK-CLICK LIKE A
CROW'S CLAWS ON A
STEEL FENCE UNDER-
LIES IT.

NOW IT'S THE KIND OF
THING THAT MAKES ME
WANT TO DANCE, BUT
I CAN'T DANCE, SO
I MAKE SOME
THINGS THAT CAN.





NOW EVERY-
THING THAT
ANNOYED ME
ABOUT THAT
SONG IS GONE
WHEN I HEAR
IT AGAIN, IT
WON'T BOTHER
ME AT ALL.

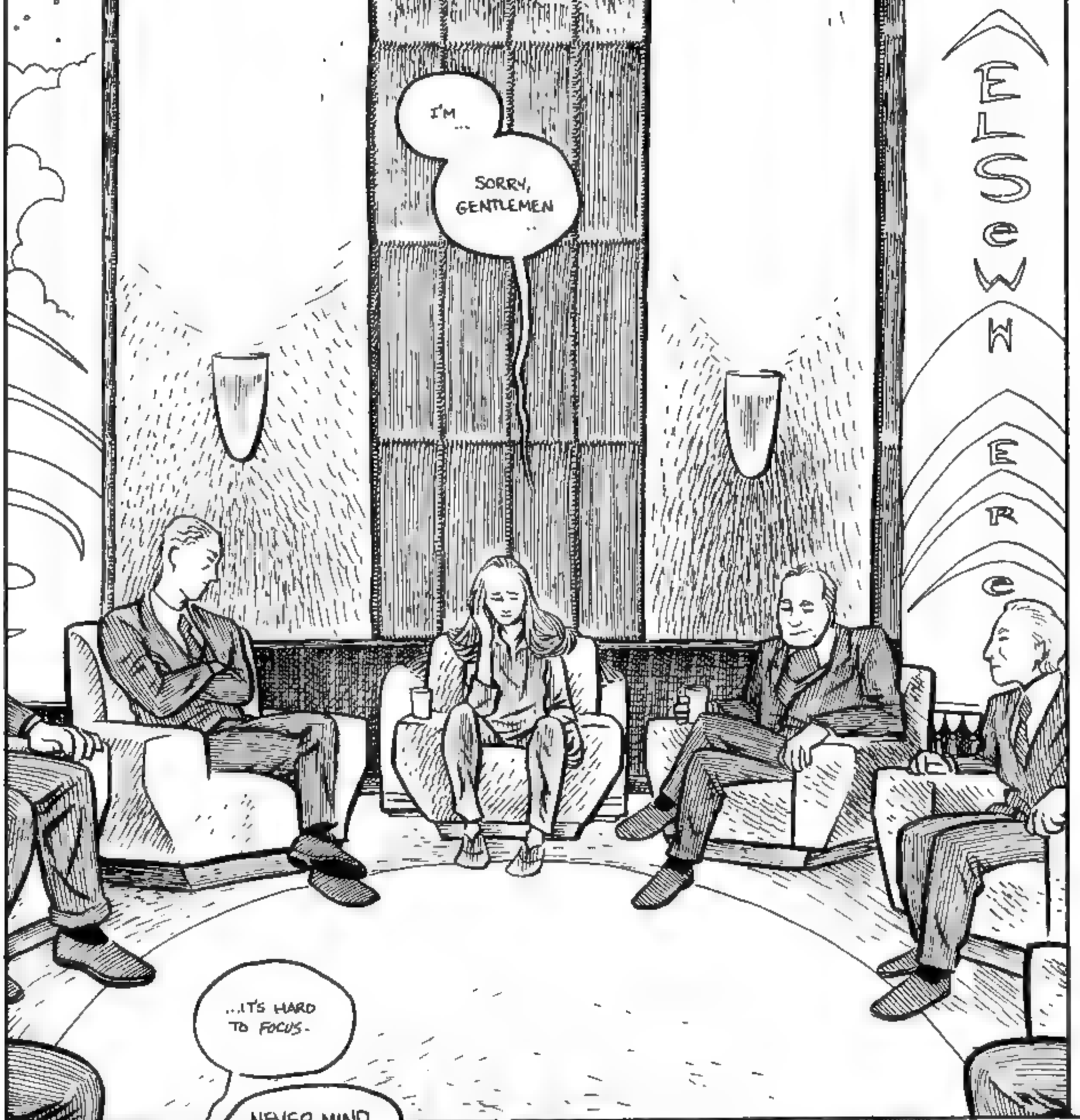
I MAY STAND HERE
DULLY INERT, UNABLE
TO MOVE TO THE MUSIC,
BUT MY CREATURES
DON'T. SMOOTH, LITHE,
FRENETICALLY QUICK,
THEY SHAKE THEIR
HANDLESS WRISTS AT
THE COLD HEAVY SKY.

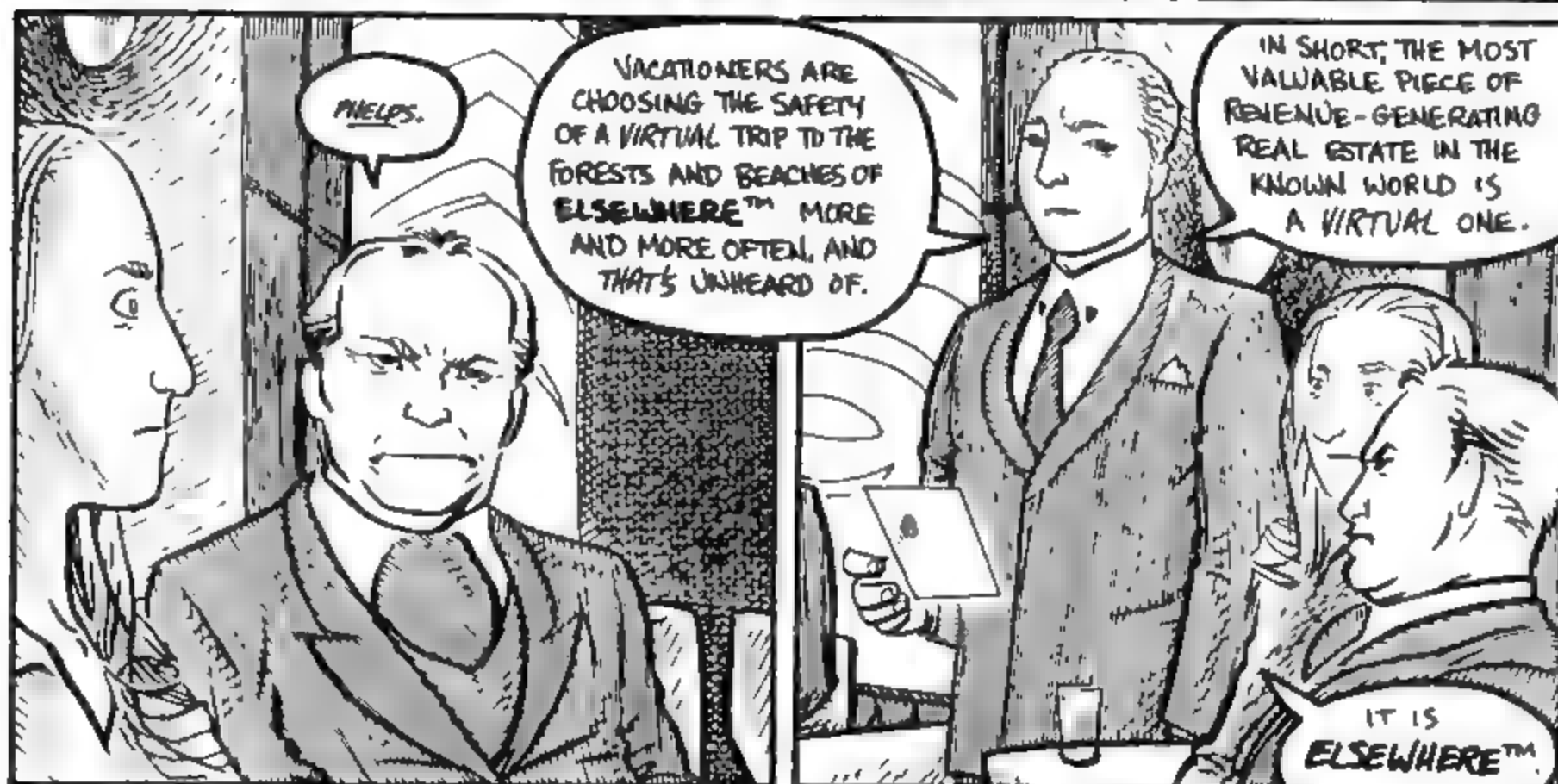
VISITORS ARE
FOLLOWING ME
HERE ALREADY.
FACES IN THE
GLOOM AND
SPASTIC HANDCLAPS
SHOW THEM TRYING
OUT THE BEAT.

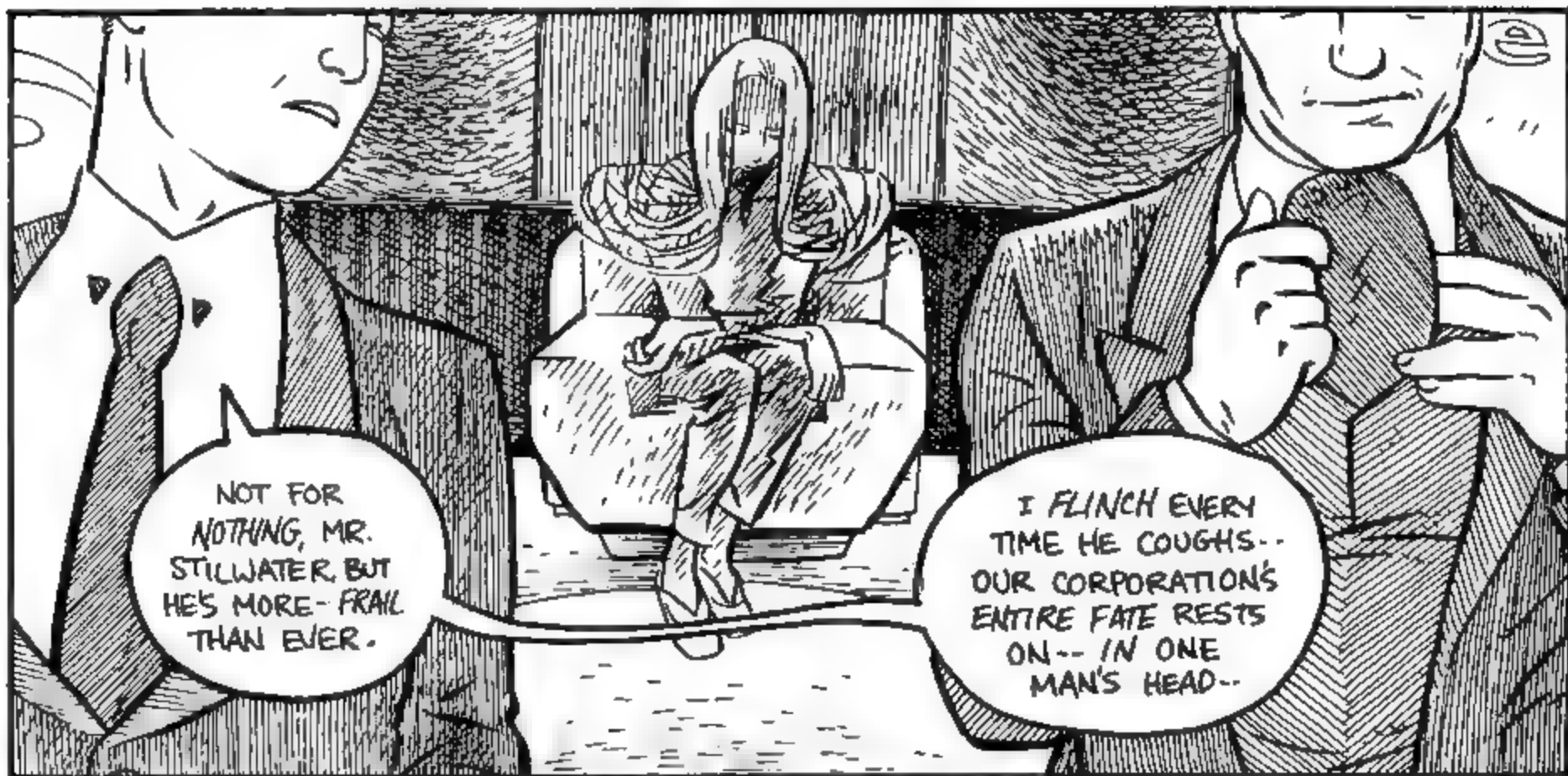
THEY WON'T DISTURB
THE DANCERS. THE
DANCERS HAVE NO
EYES OR EARS.
THEY LIVE IN
THE MUSIC.

**"DOES HE HAVE TO ZONE OUT
AT EVERY BOARD MEETING?"**

**"BITE YOUR TONGUE,
PHELPS. WE LIKE TO
SEE OUR MAGRI LOST IN
HIS LITTLE WORLD."**

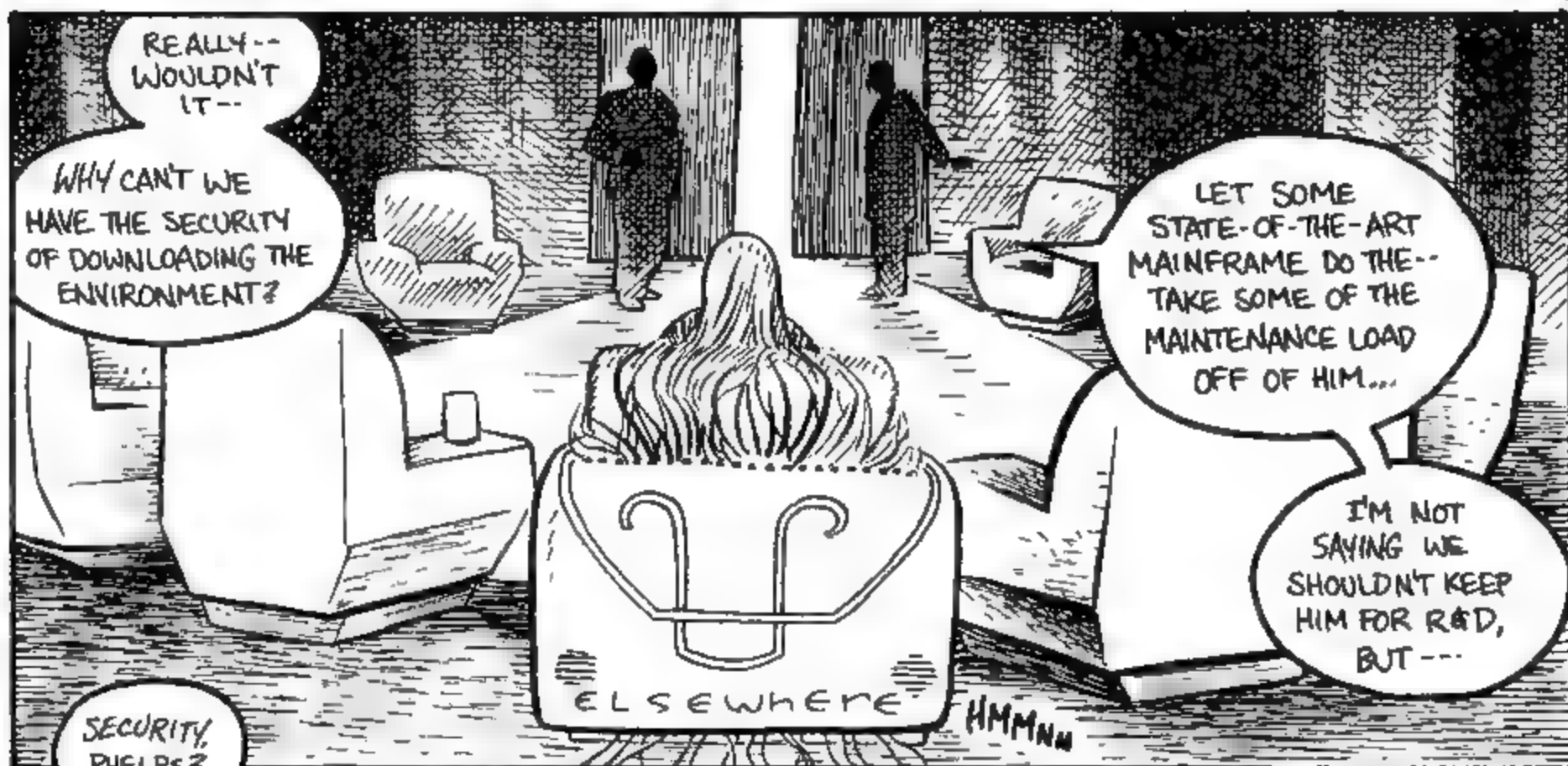






NOT FOR NOTHING, MR. STILLWATER, BUT HE'S MORE-FRAIL THAN EVER.

I FLINCH EVERY TIME HE COUGHS-- OUR CORPORATION'S ENTIRE FATE RESTS ON-- IN ONE MAN'S HEAD--



REALLY-- WOULDN'T IT--

WHY CAN'T WE HAVE THE SECURITY OF DOWNLOADING THE ENVIRONMENT?

LET SOME STATE-OF-THE-ART MAINFRAME DO THE-- TAKE SOME OF THE MAINTENANCE LOAD OFF OF HIM...

I'M NOT SAYING WE SHOULDN'T KEEP HIM FOR R&D, BUT---

SECURITY, PHELPS?

SECURITY.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND MAGRI. HE'S SOMETHING NEW.

NO FORCE ON EARTH CAN COPY ELSEWHERE -- NOT THE LEAST OF ITS IMAGES --- WHILE IT'S IN OUR MR. WHITE'S HEAD, NOT AGAINST HIS WILL.

LET IT STAY LOCKED UP IN THAT RATTLY SKULL OF HIS.

SURE, SOMEDAY MAGRI WILL TAKE IT ALL WITH HIM. WHEN HE GOES, WE'LL BE LEFT TO PICK OVER THE RESIDUALS. BETTER THAT THAN TO SEE IT STOLEN, COPIED EVERYWHERE.

IT'S THE ONLY INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THAT CAN BE PROPERLY EXPLOITED BY ITS STRUCTURAL COMPANY.



OUR MAGRI.

HE'S SOMETHING ELSE.

I WAS
CALLED
AWAY

FOR ONLY
A MOMENT

AND
THIS

I FELT A TWINGE IN MY RIGHT TEMPLE
LIKE AN ICE-CREAM HEADACHE BUT ON THE
SIDE NOT THE FRONT--I GUESS THAT'S WHEN

IT

HE
DID

THIS



--- WHEN I'VE GOT ---

--- IT'S HARD TO FOCUS ---

THE VISITORS- WHO
CAME TO WATCH --

-- HE PUT THEM
IN THE FIRE --

THEY LOOK SO BEMUSED--
LIKE-- PEOPLE AT THE
OPERA WHO DON'T KNOW
WHEN TO APPLAUD--

-- DON'T THEY KNOW
WHAT THAT'S DOING
TO THEM?

--- RUNNING THROUGH MY HEAD ---

SOMETHING --



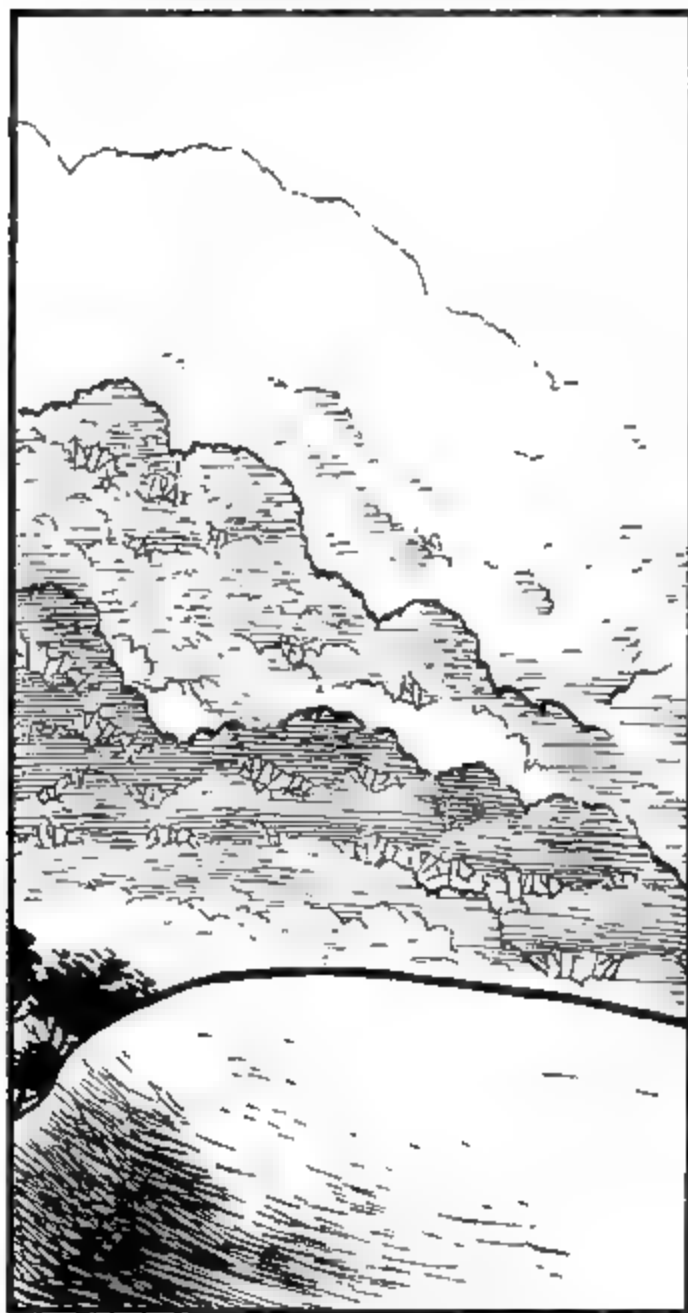
POP!

OW!

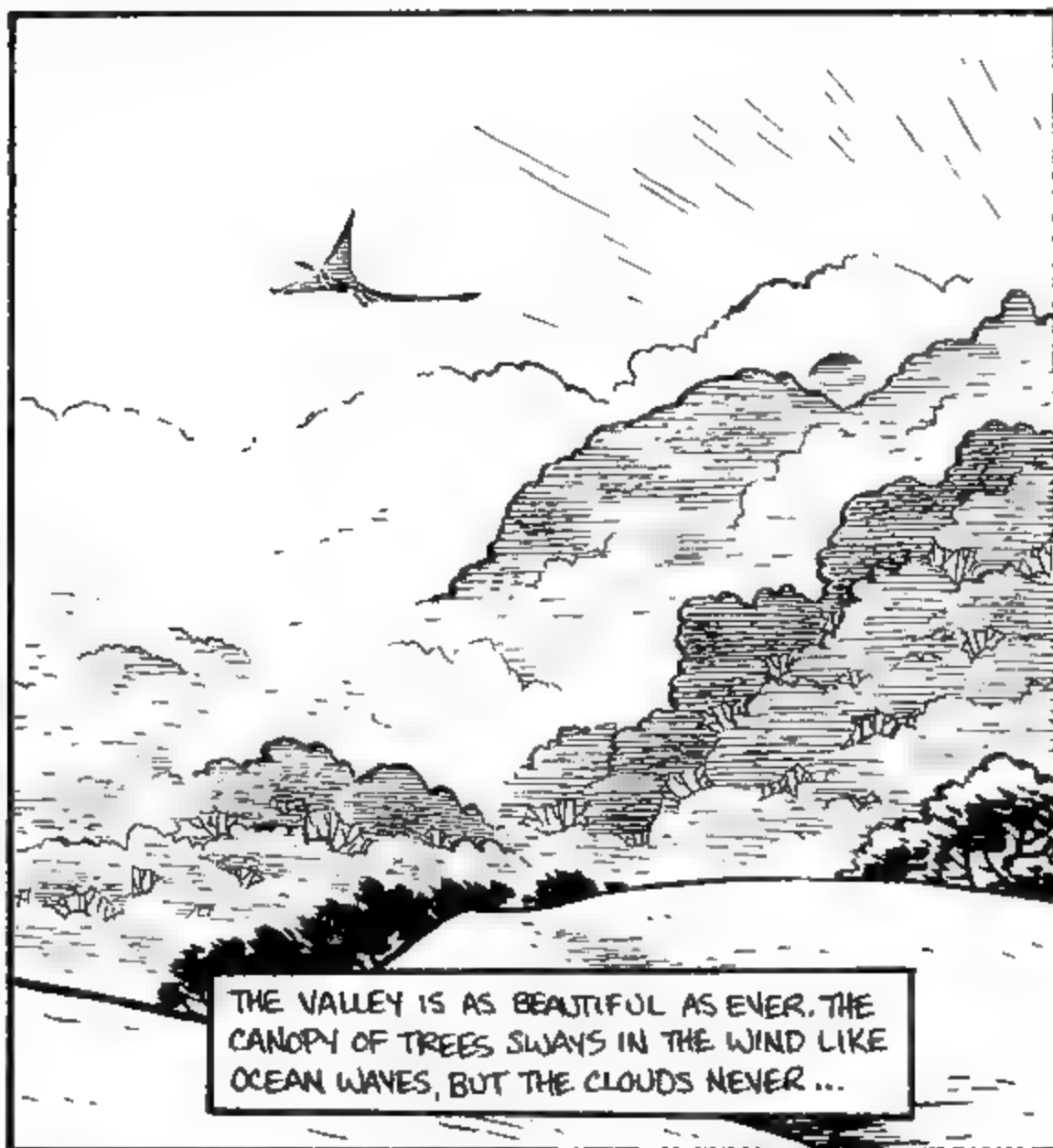


ME AGAIN. AYO. HI.

I GOT INTO ELSEWHERE AGAIN AFTER THAT-- MONSTER THING KICKED ME OUT.



I'M STILL UP ON THE SAME BLUFF. I CAN SEE-- STRAIGHT AHEAD, ANYWAY-- I CAN HEAR AND I CAN FEEL THE WIND ON MY SKIN. I CAN SORT OF... TURN ON MY AXIS, LIKE A LIGHTHOUSE LAMP.

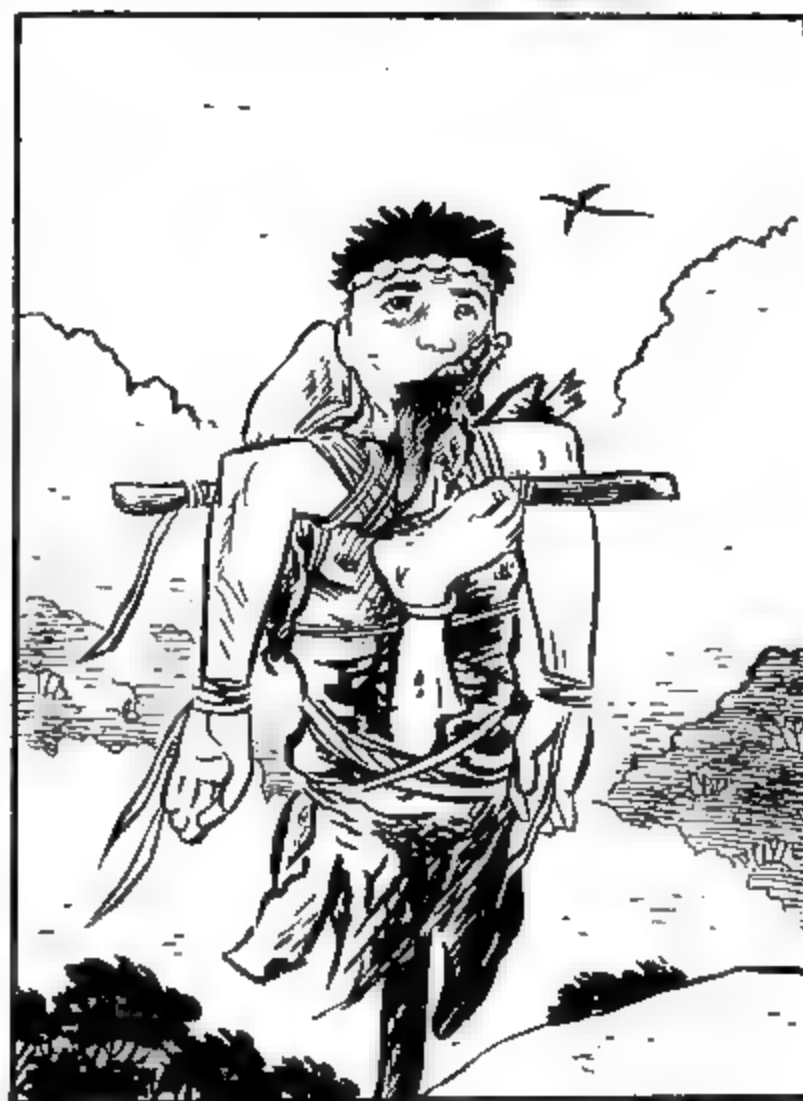


THE VALLEY IS AS BEAUTIFUL AS EVER. THE CANOPY OF TREES SWAYS IN THE WIND LIKE OCEAN WAVES, BUT THE CLOUDS NEVER ...

(WHY CAN'T I-- WHY CAN'T I MOVE?)

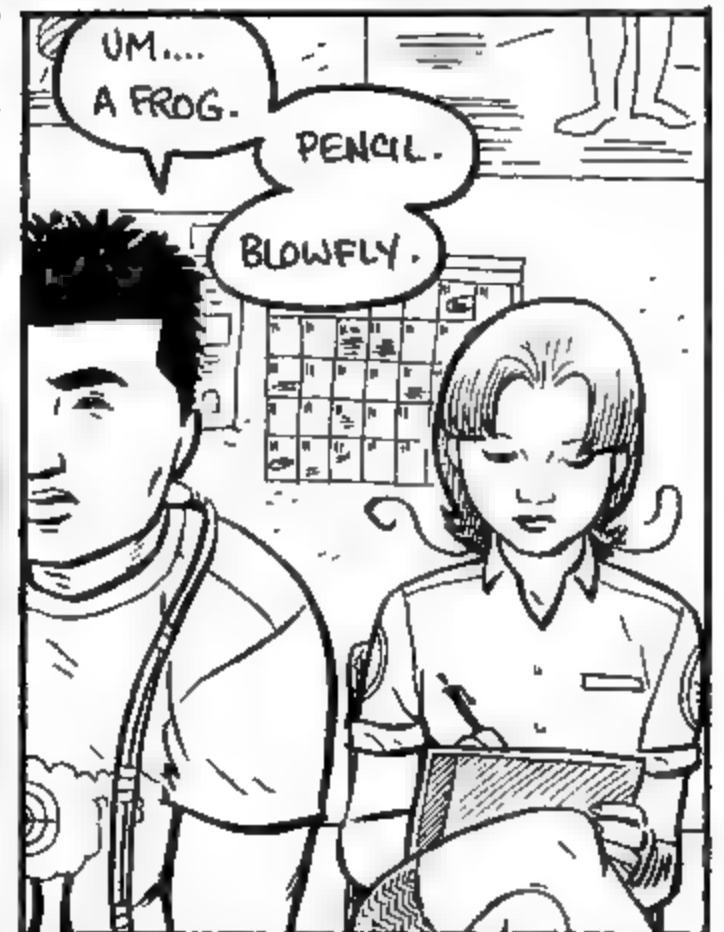
I'M GLAD I'M BACK IN. I'VE NEVER GONE IN FOR ALL THE QUESTS, PUZZLES, ROLE-PLAYING STUFF SET IN ELSEWHERE.

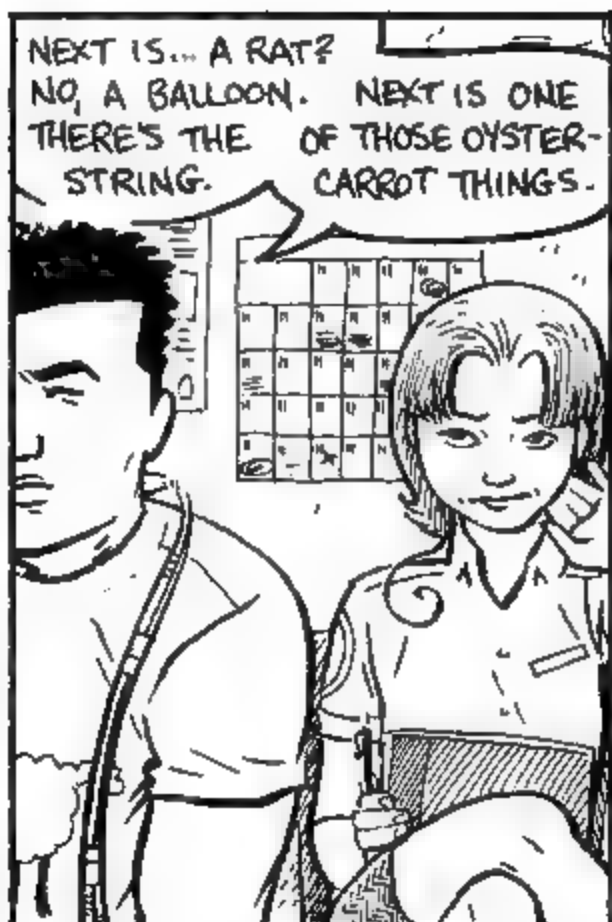
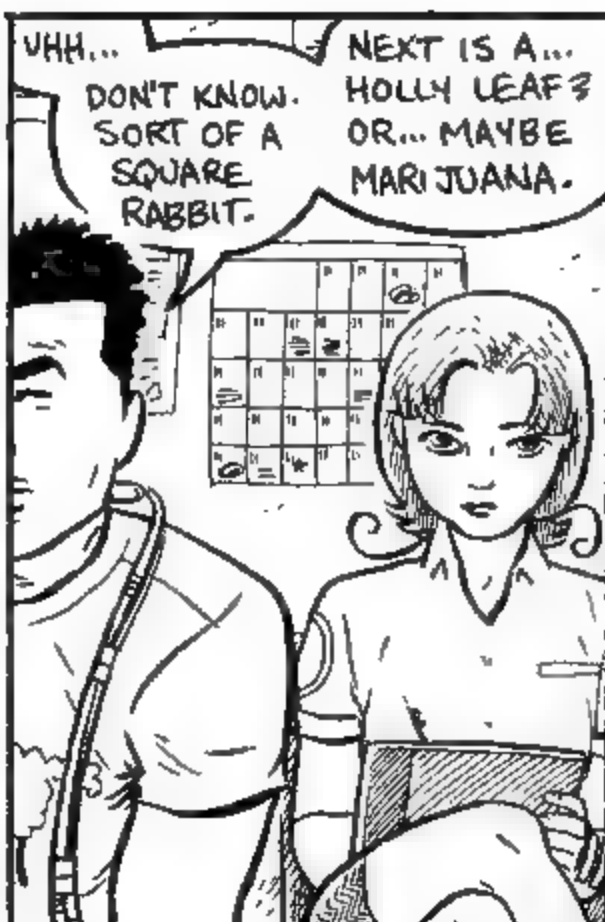
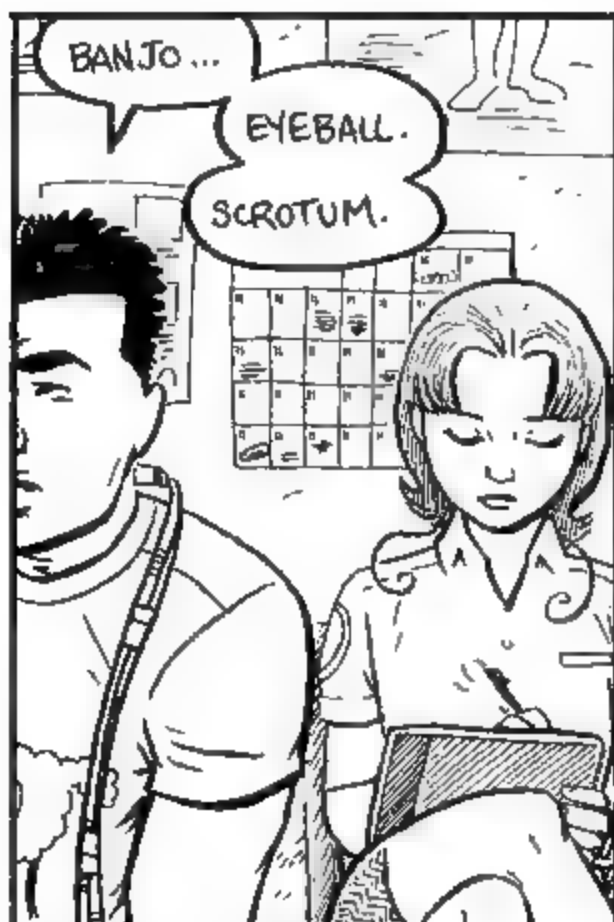
I'M JUST GLAD TO BE HERE. THE AIR'S SO COLD AND CLEAR... I COULDN'T STAND IT IF I DIDN'T HAVE ELSEWHERE TO GO.

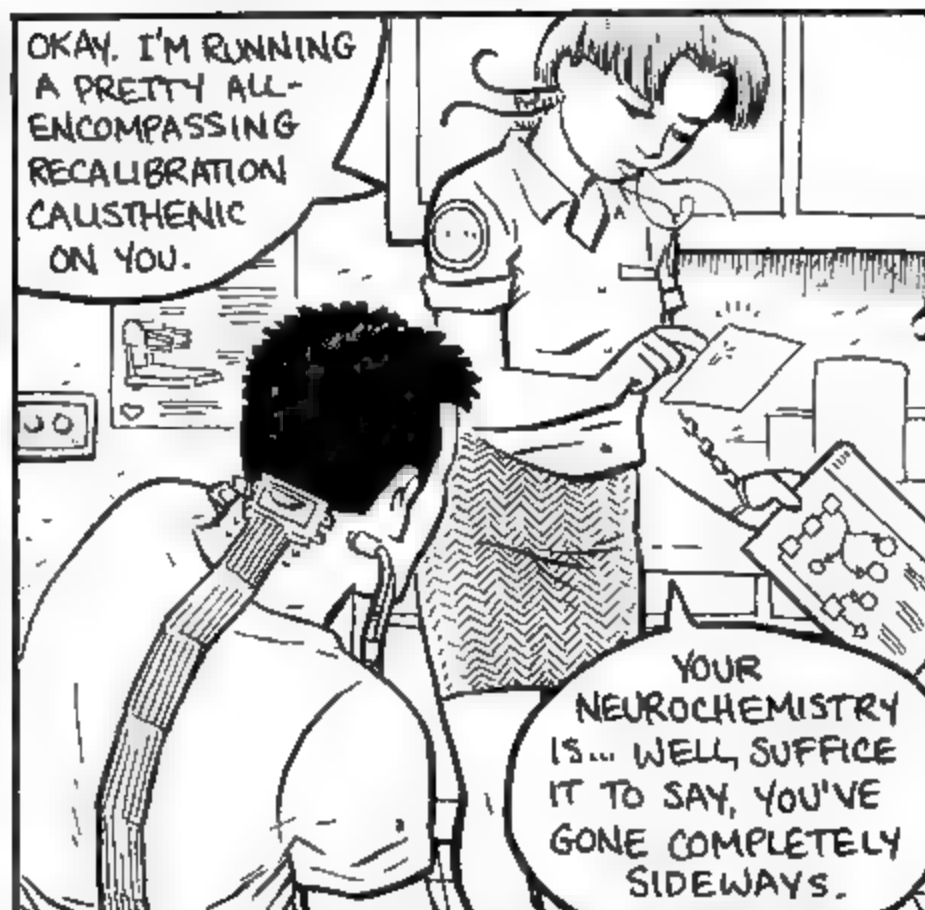


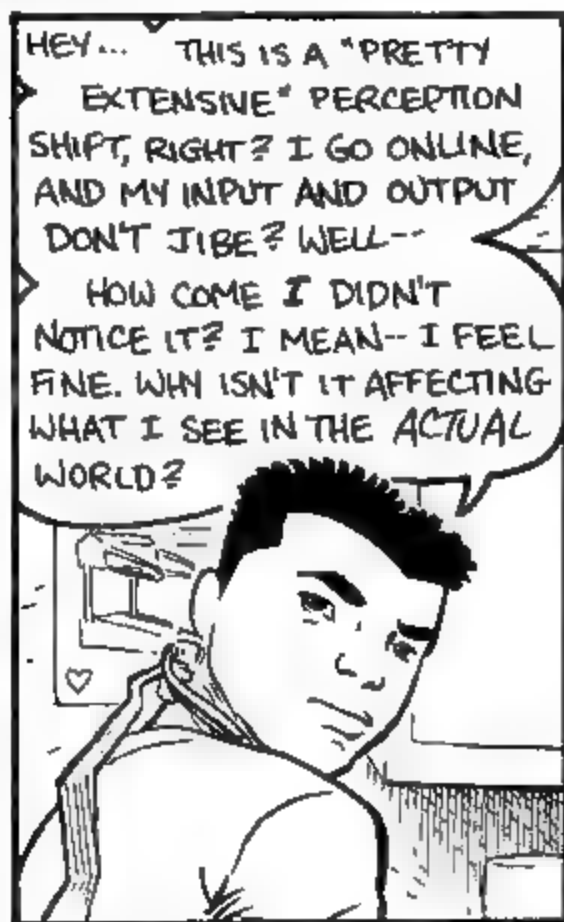
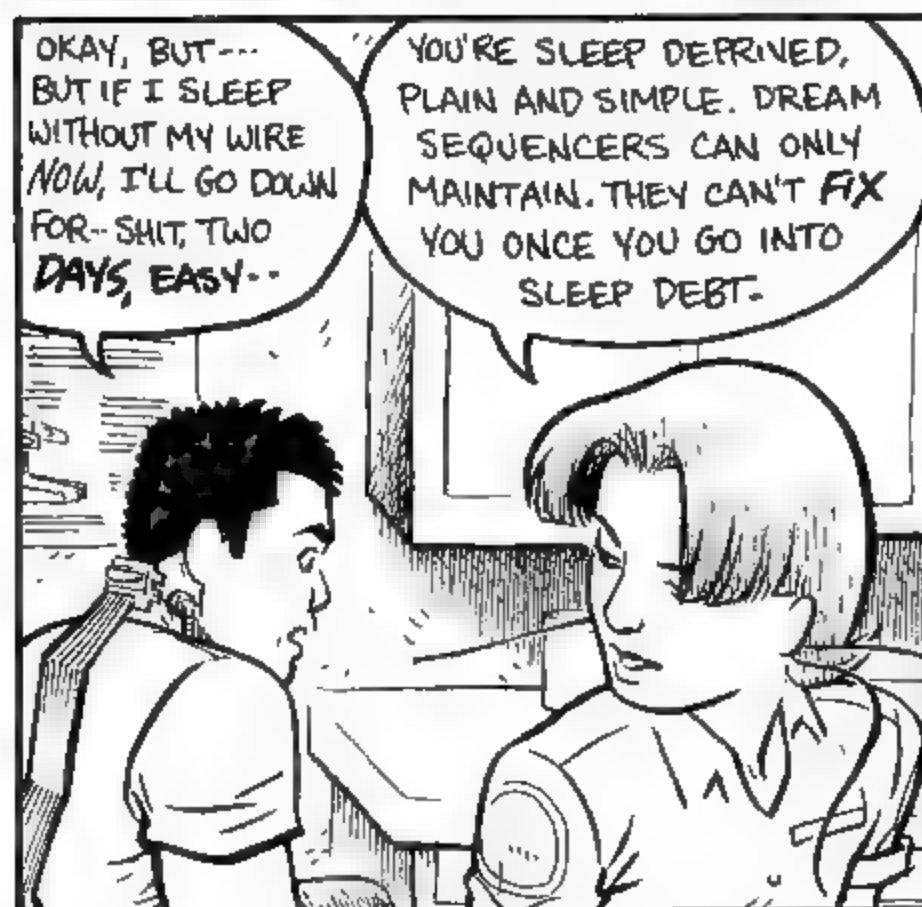
I JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME.











ELSEWHERE...



WELL, THE
THE TREES ARE
QUITE LOVELY....

I HATE PUZZLES.
ALWAYS HAVE.

ESPECIALLY THOSE
GOD-AWFUL HIDDEN-
PICTURE THINGS. YOU
KNOW--"FIND THE
SEVEN MONSTERS
HIDING IN THE ROOM."

THEY'RE NEVER IN THE
CLOSET OR UNDER THE
TABLE. THEY'RE WORKED
INTO THE STAIR RAILINGS
OR THE WALLPAPER OR
REFLECTIONS ON THE
TOASTER. IT'S AS IF
THE ROOM ITSELF IS
THE MONSTER.

EVERYBODY ELSE
GOT IT FASTER THAN
I DID, IN SCHOOL.

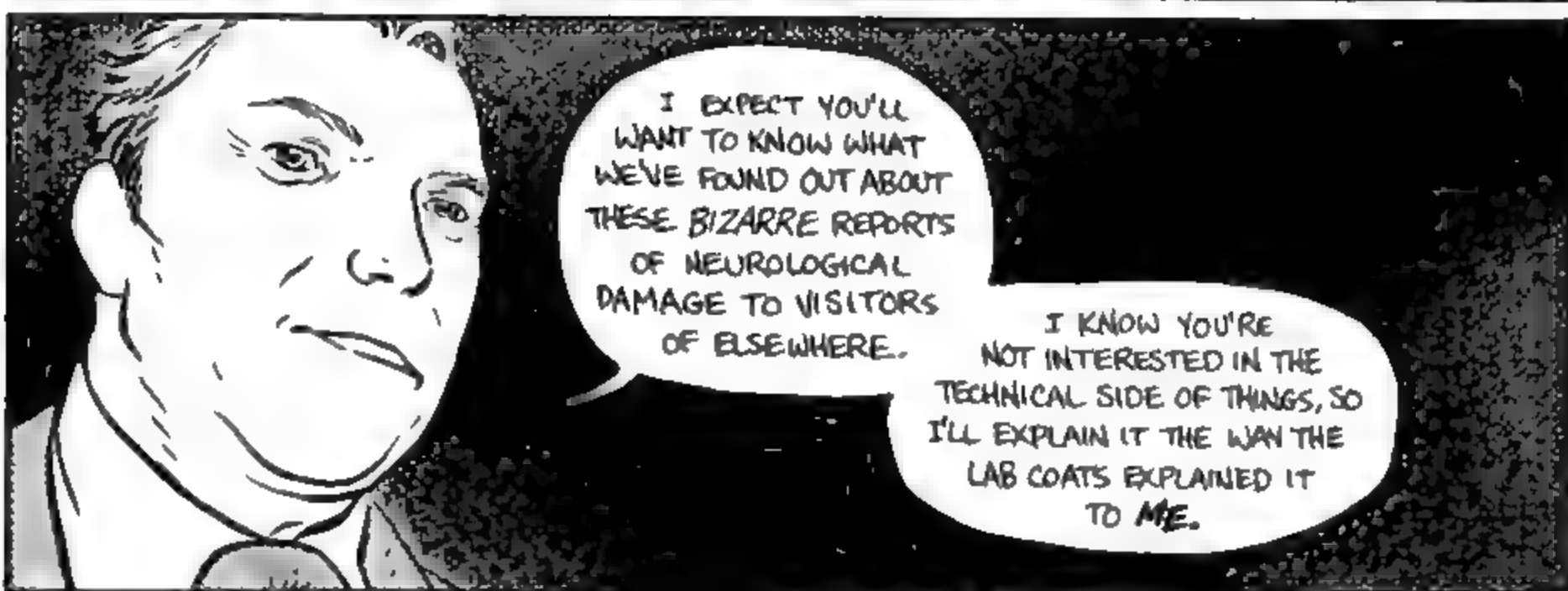
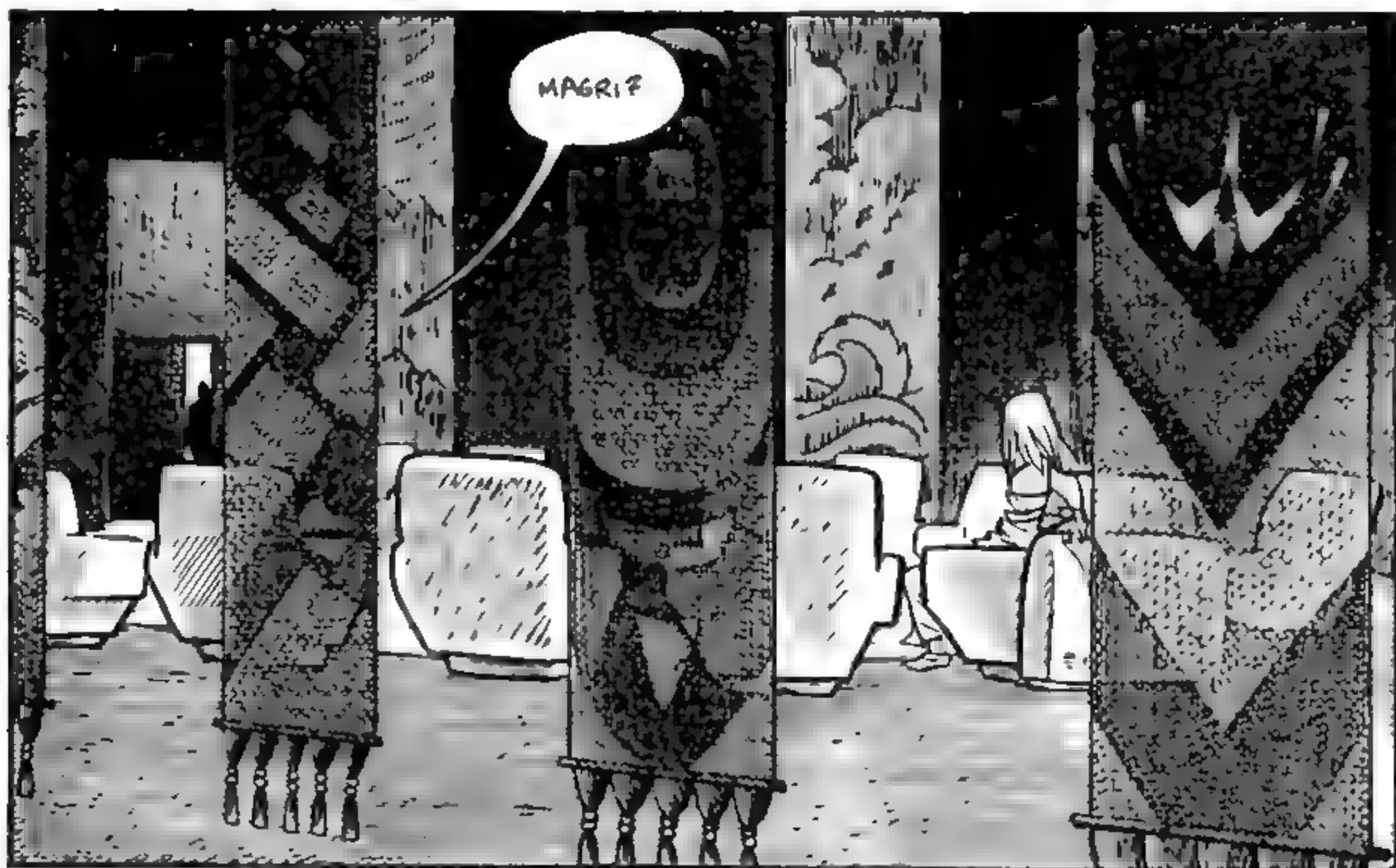
WHY SHOULD I FEEL
STUPID? IF SOMEBODY'S
HIDING FROM YOU, YOU
DON'T WASTE TIME
LOOKING IN A LITTLE
FLOWER VASE.

SAME WITH BOOKS AND
GAMES. I DON'T MIND
SYMBOLISM IF IT DOESN'T
GET IN THE WAY OF THE
STORY. I HATE GAMES
THAT ARE FIXED SO YOU
CAN'T DO ANYTHING
WITHOUT SOLVING SOME
DOPEY PUZZLE.

I'M A STRAIGHTFORWARD
GUY. GIVE ME AN
ADVENTURE. DON'T GIVE
ME ILLUSIONS AND NASTY
GRINS ON ALL THE
INANIMATE OBJECTS.

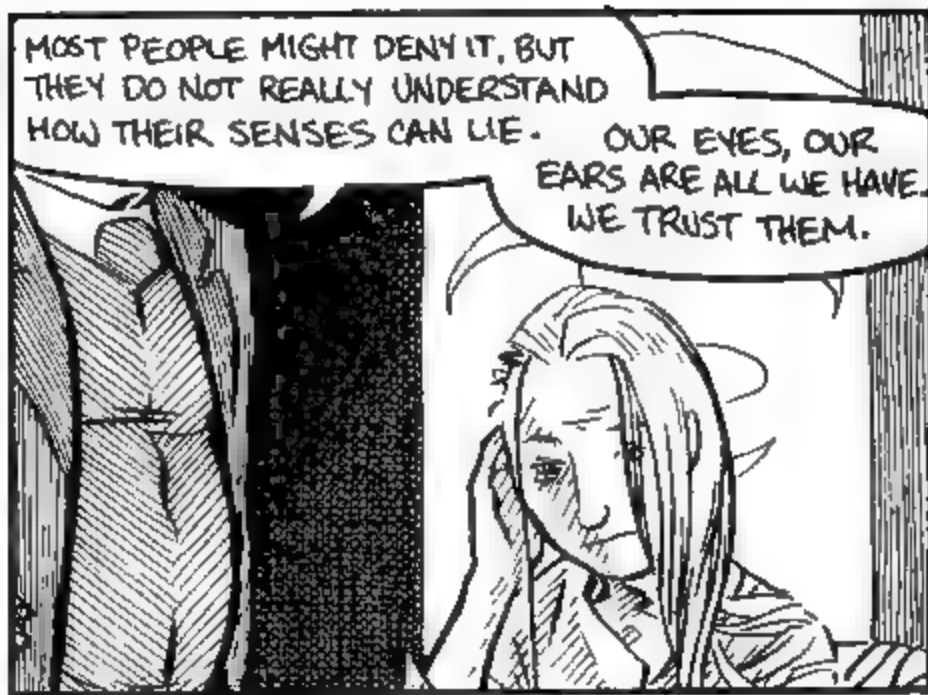
DON'T GIVE ME MISTY
HORRORS AND WRONG
THINGS I CAN'T QUITE
SEE.



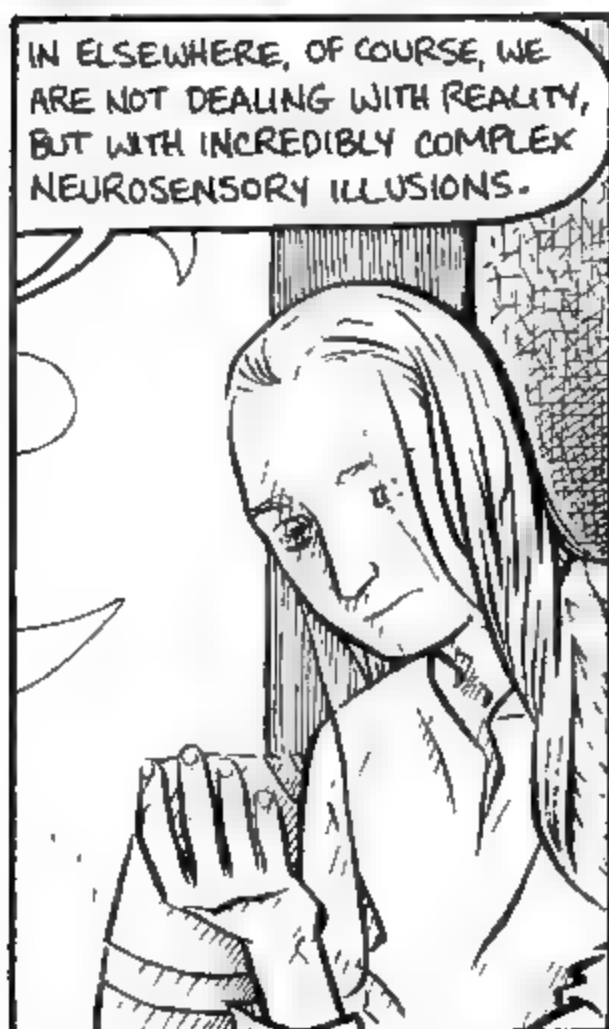




IT'S ALL AN ILLUSION,
THIS "BRAIN DAMAGE,"
IT DOESN'T EXIST.



MOST PEOPLE MIGHT DENY IT, BUT
THEY DO NOT REALLY UNDERSTAND
HOW THEIR SENSES CAN LIE. OUR EYES, OUR
EARS ARE ALL WE HAVE.
WE TRUST THEM.



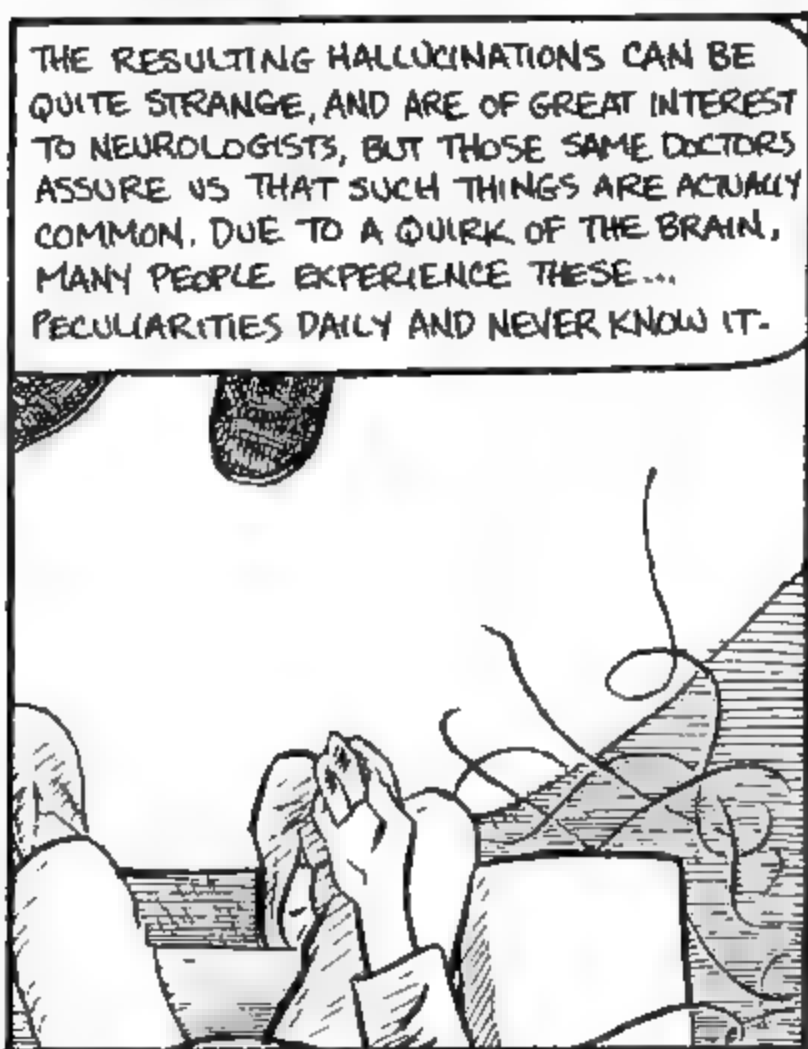
IN ELSEWHERE, OF COURSE, WE
ARE NOT DEALING WITH REALITY,
BUT WITH INCREDIBLY COMPLEX
NEUROSENSORY ILLUSIONS.



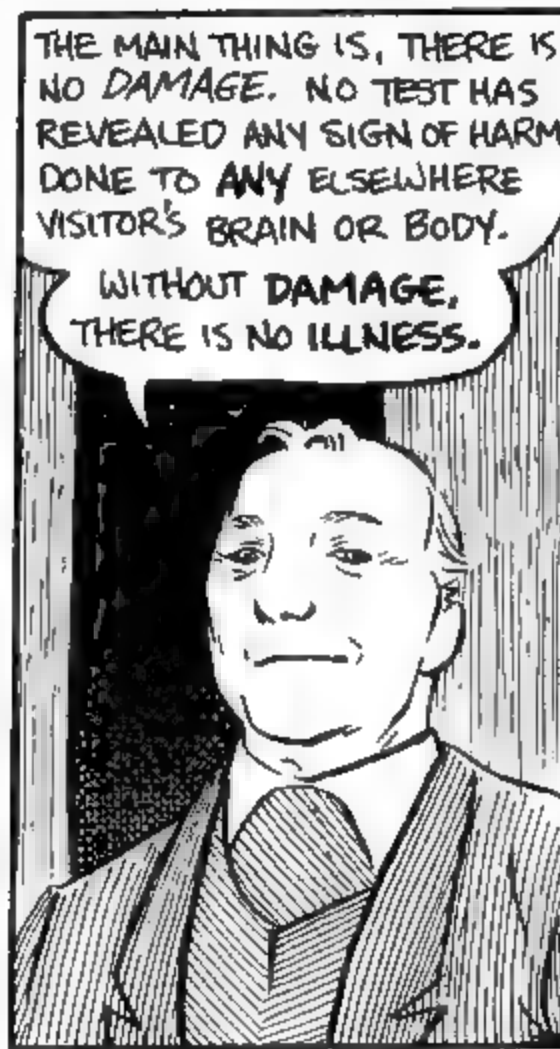
THE EXPLORER OF VIRTUAL
REALITY TRUSTS HIS "GOLEM,"
OR ILLUSORY, SENSES. HE FORGETS
THAT HE IS NOT SEEING AND
HEARING REAL THINGS.



WHAT WE ARE SEEING ARE...
COGNITIVE DISSONANCES BETWEEN
THE VISITORS' VIRTUAL SELVES
AND THEIR REAL SELVES.



THE RESULTING HALLUCINATIONS CAN BE
QUITE STRANGE, AND ARE OF GREAT INTEREST
TO NEUROLOGISTS, BUT THOSE SAME DOCTORS
ASSURE US THAT SUCH THINGS ARE ACTUALLY
COMMON. DUE TO A QUIRK OF THE BRAIN,
MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THESE...
PECULIARITIES DAILY AND NEVER KNOW IT.



THE MAIN THING IS, THERE IS
NO DAMAGE. NO TEST HAS
REVEALED ANY SIGN OF HARM
DONE TO ANY ELSEWHERE
VISITOR'S BRAIN OR BODY.
WITHOUT DAMAGE,
THERE IS NO ILLNESS.



SO, YOU
SEE, WE'RE
FINE.

THERE'S
NOTHING
TO WORRY
ABOUT.

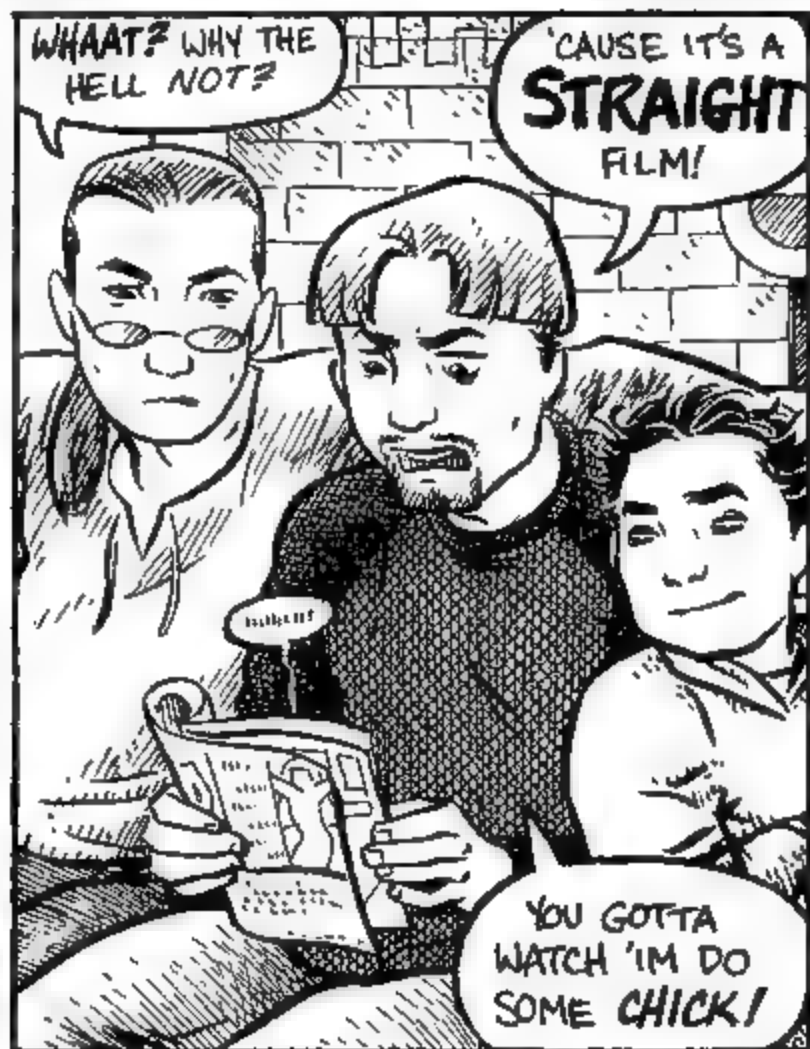
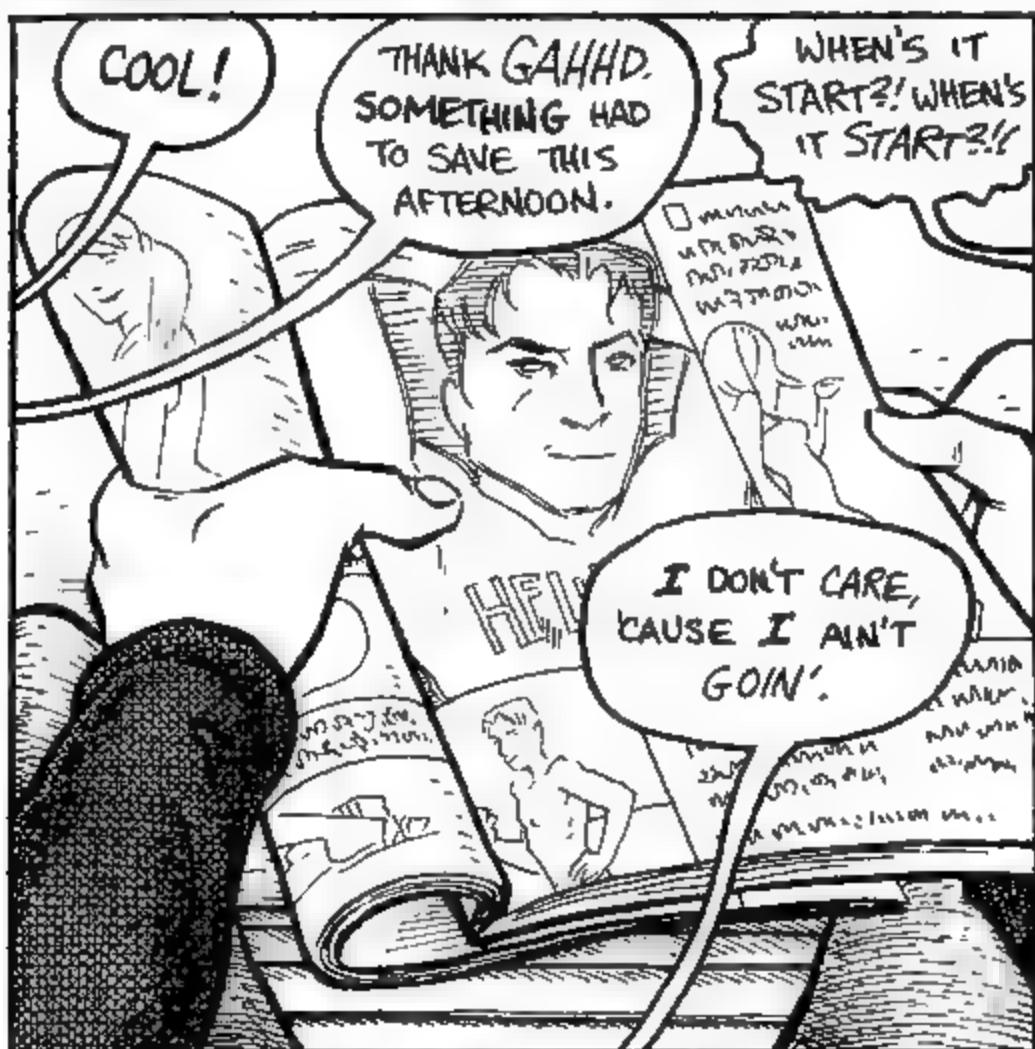


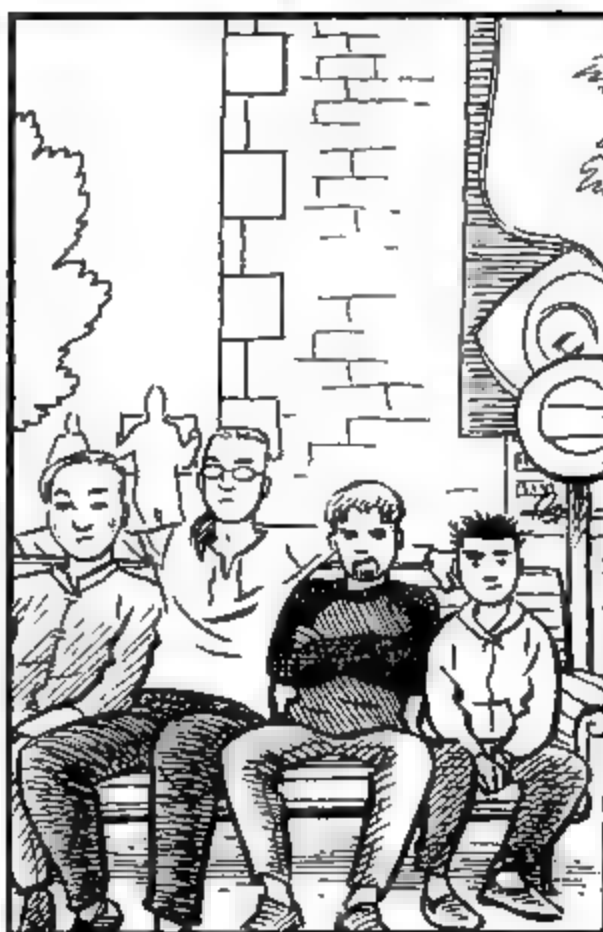
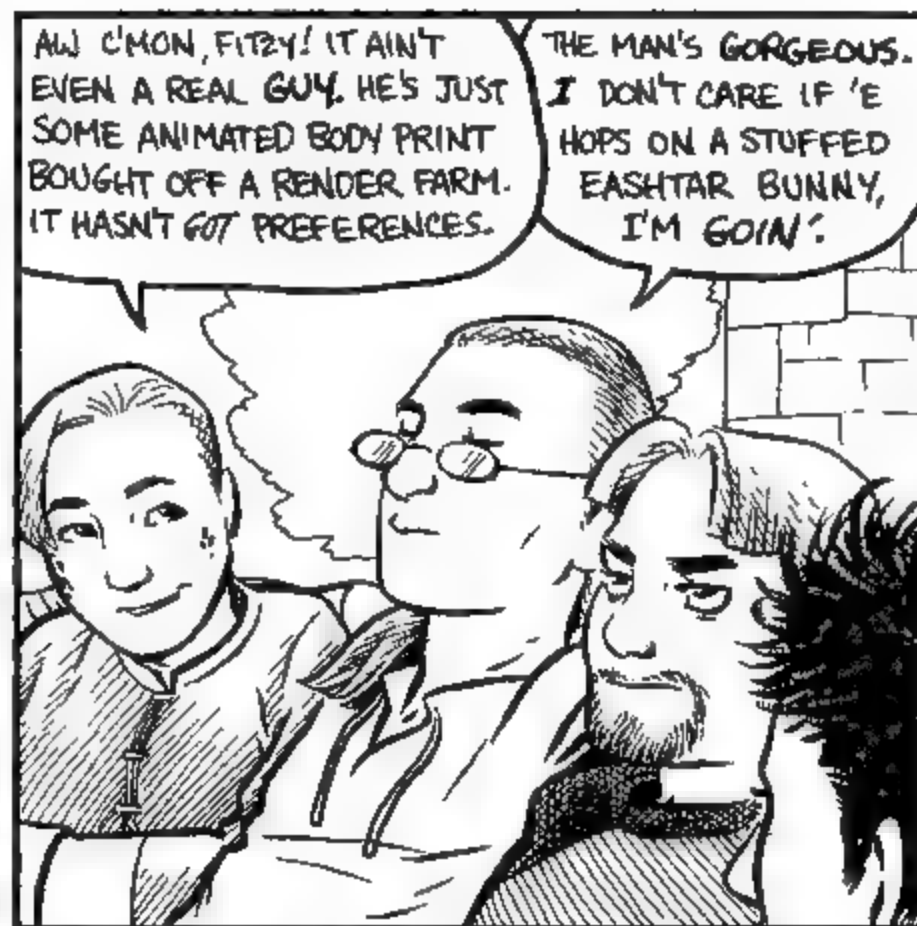
OH.

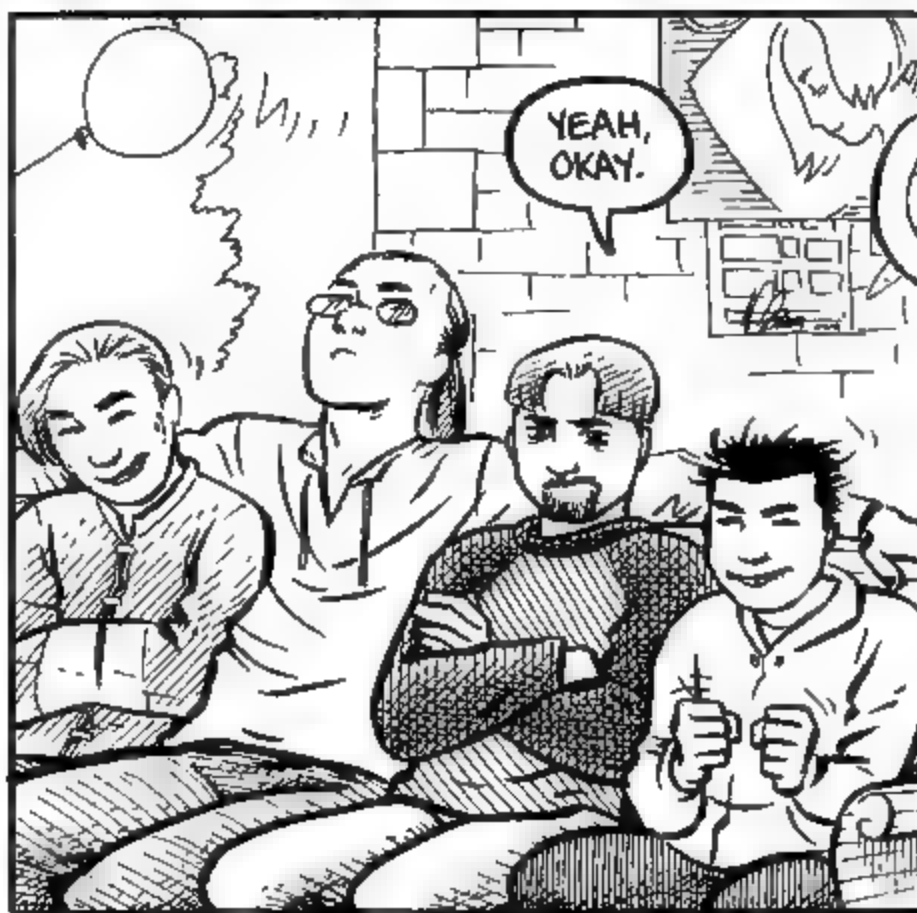
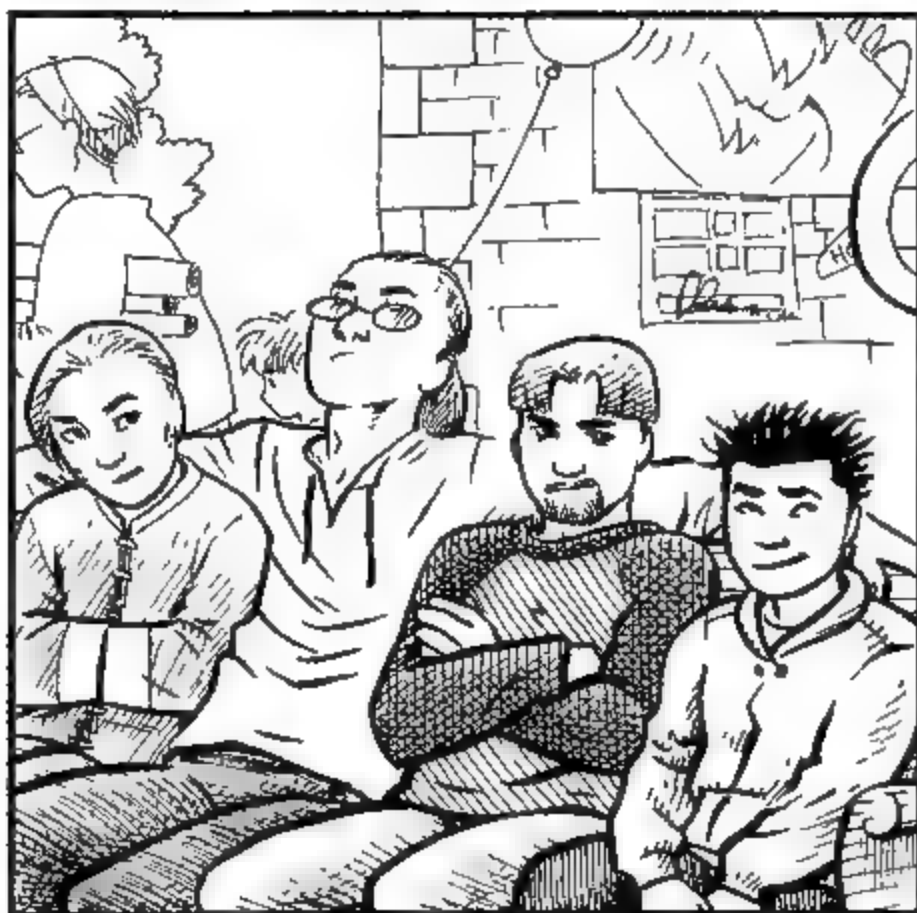
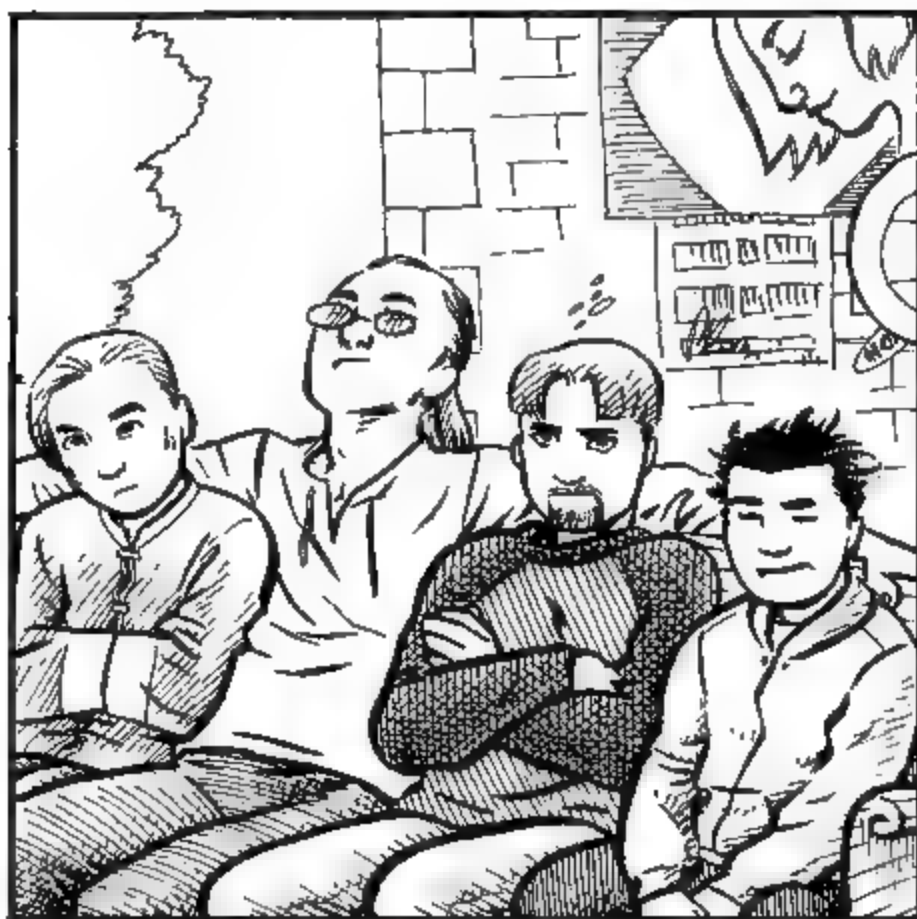
THAT'S
GOOD.

CHAPTER THREE









ESCAPE

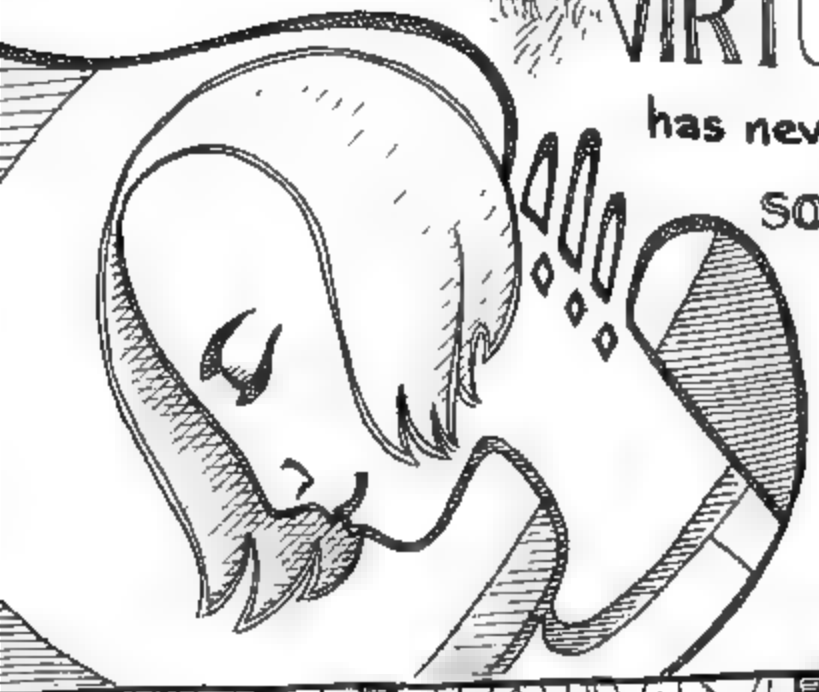
EXPLORE



GO
ELSEWHERE

NEW IDENTITIES
DOWNLOADED
WEEKLY
LOOK THROUGH
NEW EYES!

VIRTUALITY
has never been
SO REAL



TODAY



I AM
NOT
HERE.

I AM NOT
SEEING
THIS.

I AM NOT
ELSEWHERE.

AAOW...



"OH, HELL! NOT ANOTHER ONE!"

"THIS IS SOME WEB-BASED MELTDOWN. WE'VE GOT TO CUT OFF FROM THE NET!"

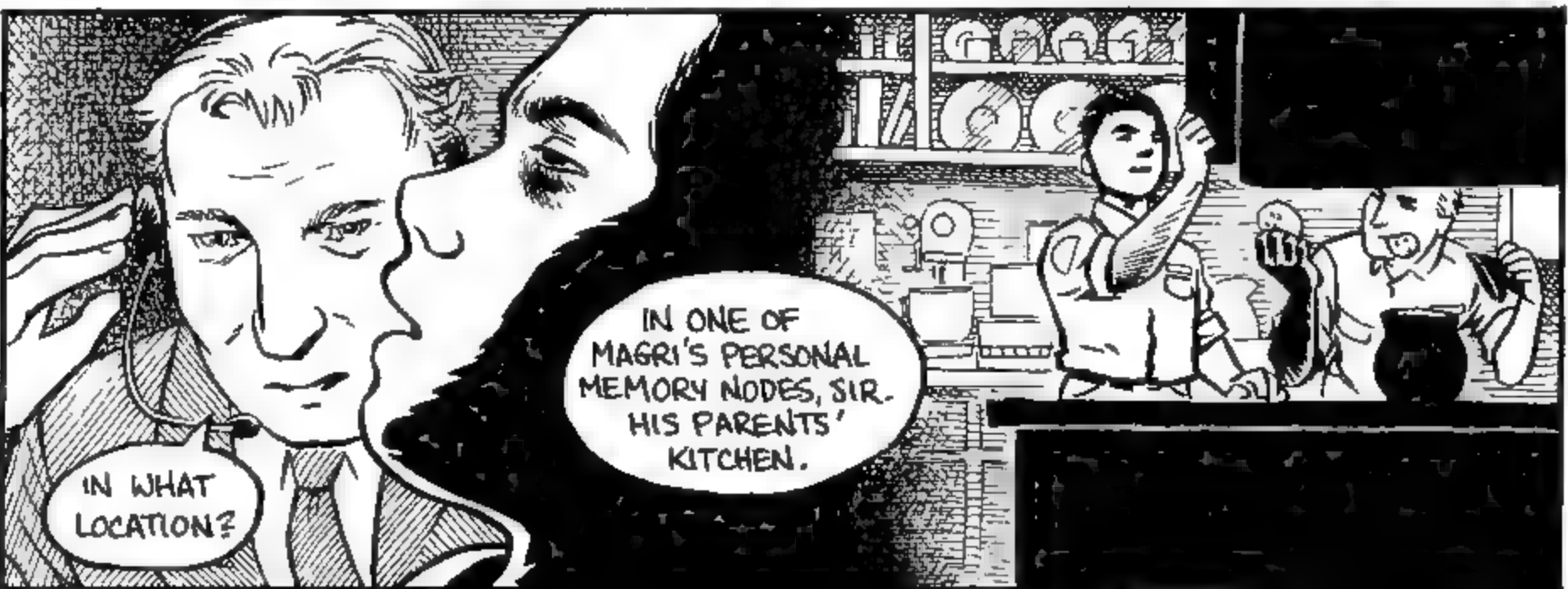
"NO. NOT YET. PEOPLE AREN'T UPSET ENOUGH JUST YET."

"BROADBAND CONNECTION IS OUR MOST EFFECTIVE PERK... WE CUT OFF OUR EMPLOYEES, AND THERE WILL BE A STAMPEDE FOR THE DOOR SUCH AS BANKRUPTCIES ARE MADE OF..."

"YOU THINK ANYBODY WILL DO THIS JOB FOR WHAT WE CAN PAY AND FANCY FREE COFFEE?"

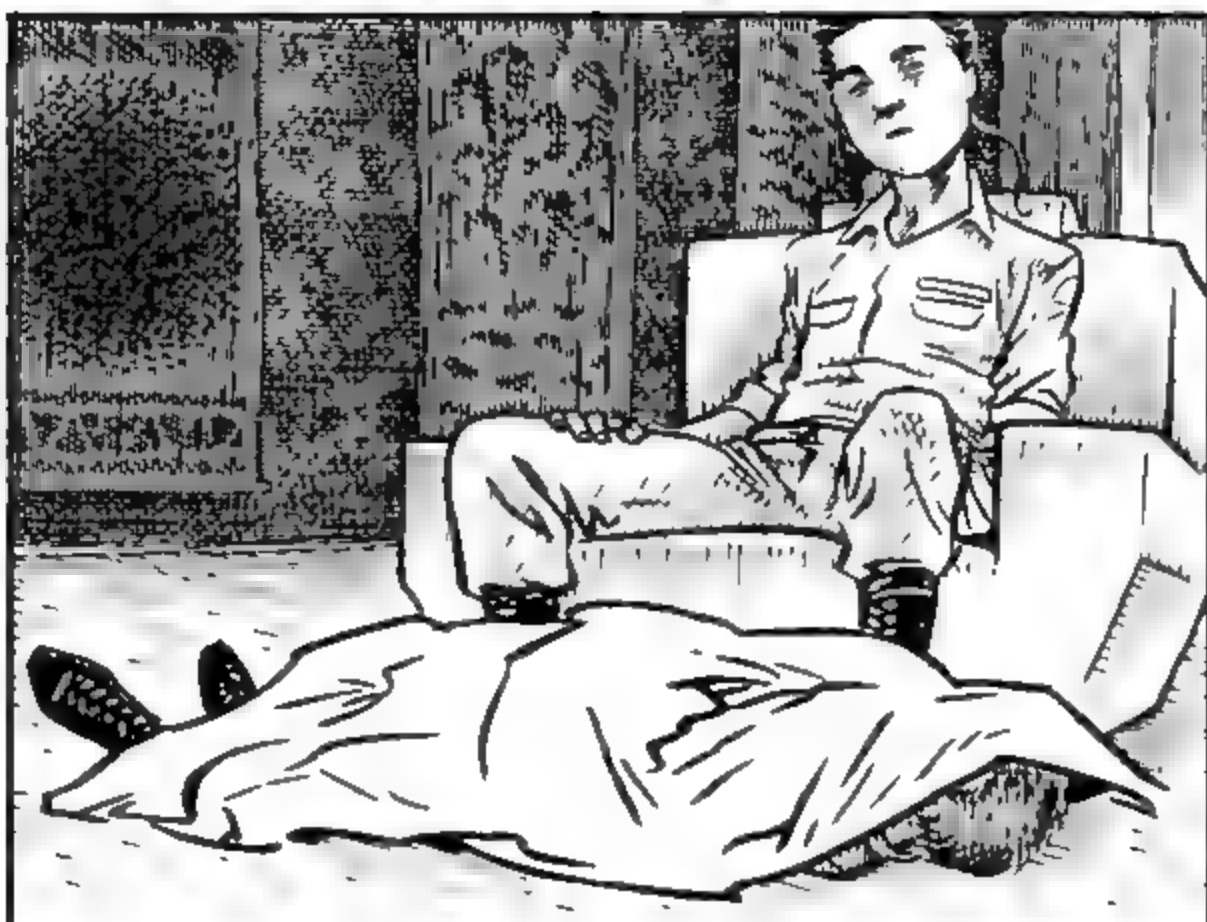
"WATCH AND WAIT."

"WE HAVEN'T SEEN THE WORST OF THIS YET."

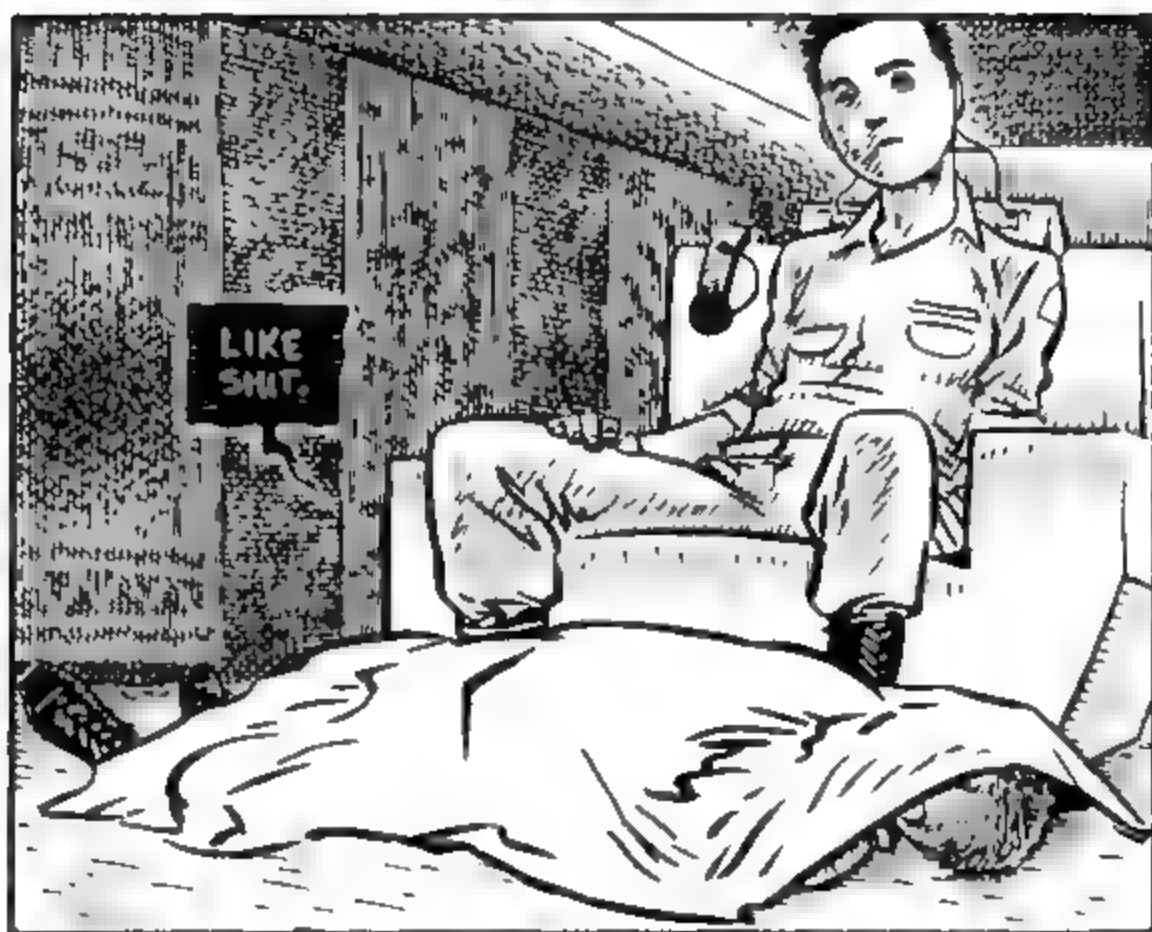








THANK YOU, MR. STILLWATER.



IT HAS LONG BEEN
MY CONCEIT THAT I
AM NOT A PERSON.

"MAGRI WHITE" IS THE
NAME I WAS GIVEN,
BUT IT'S NOT REALLY
IMPORTANT.

I AM NOT A PERSON.
I AM A PLACE.

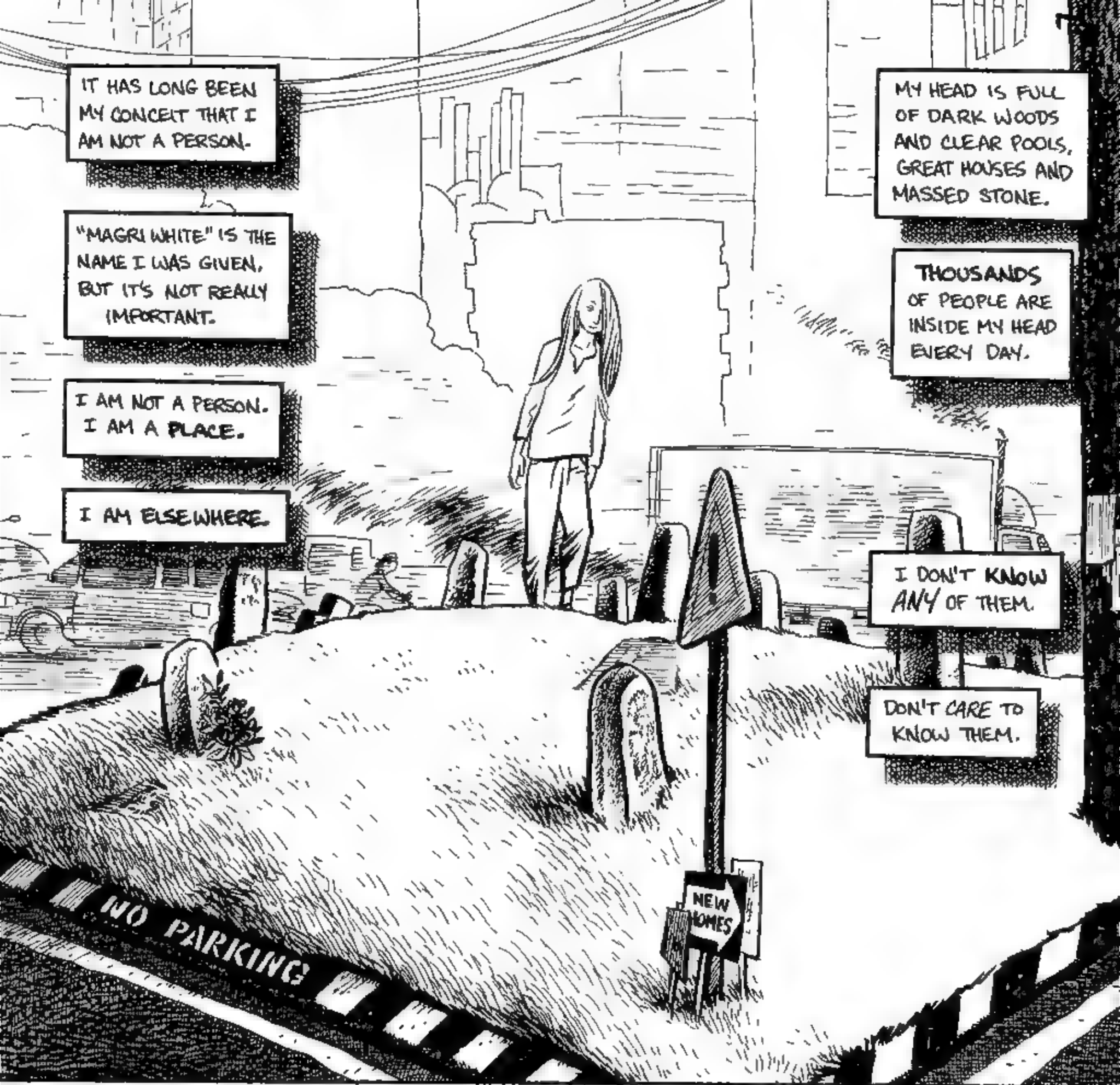
I AM ELSEWHERE.

MY HEAD IS FULL
OF DARK WOODS
AND CLEAR POOLS,
GREAT HOUSES AND
MASSED STONE.

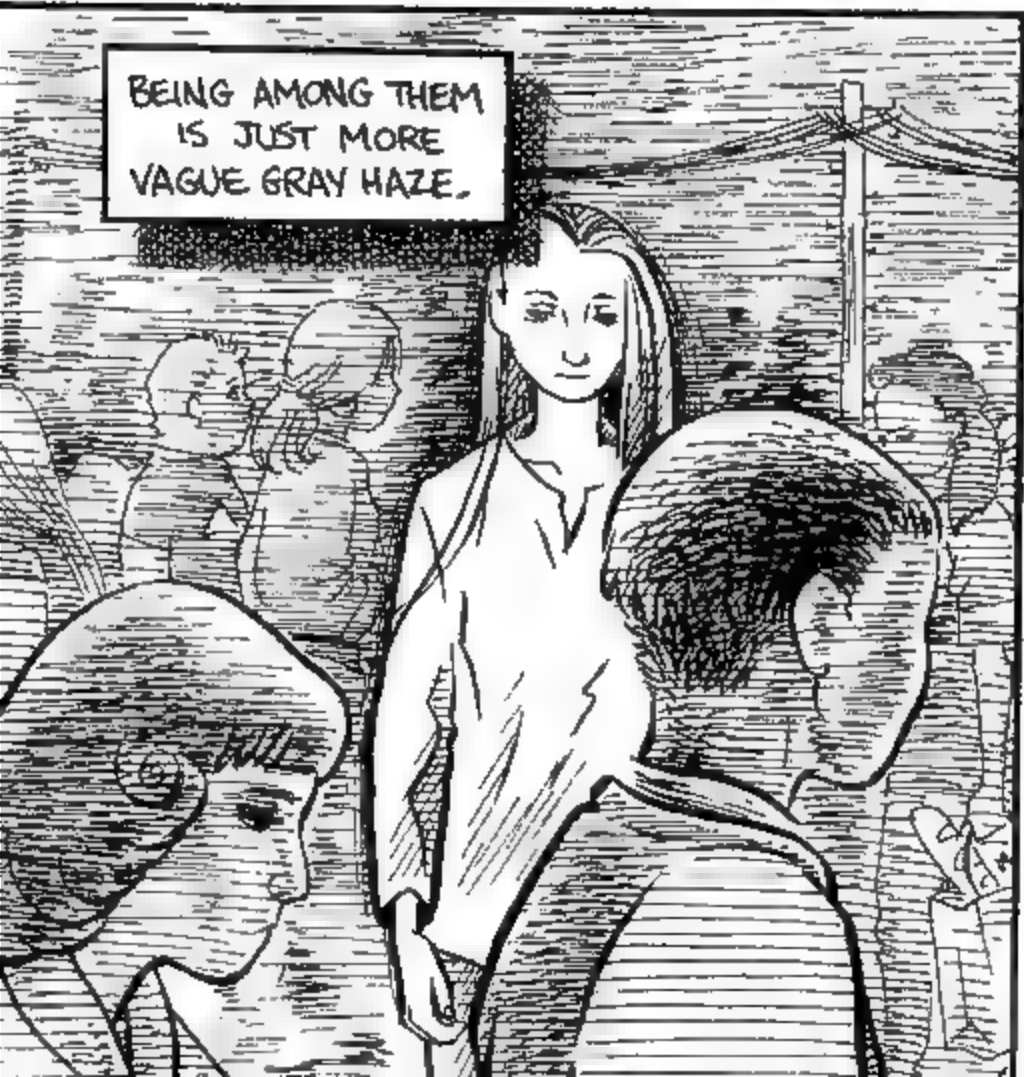
THOUSANDS
OF PEOPLE ARE
INSIDE MY HEAD
EVERY DAY.

I DON'T KNOW
ANY OF THEM.

DON'T CARE TO
KNOW THEM.



BEING AMONG THEM
IS JUST MORE
VAGUE GRAY HAZE.

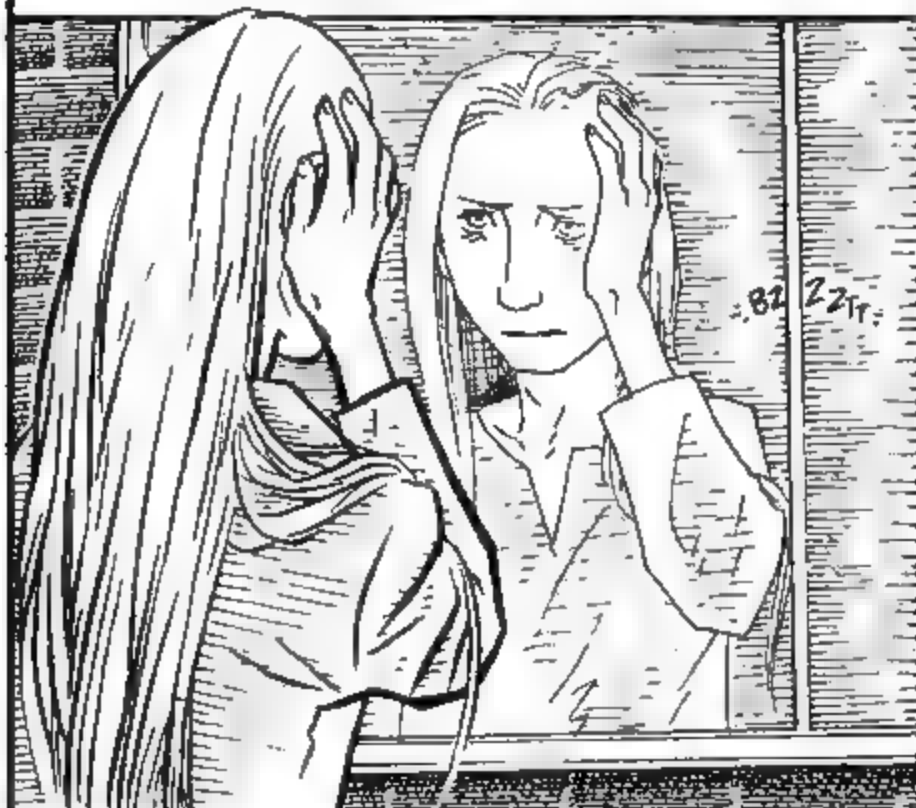


OH....

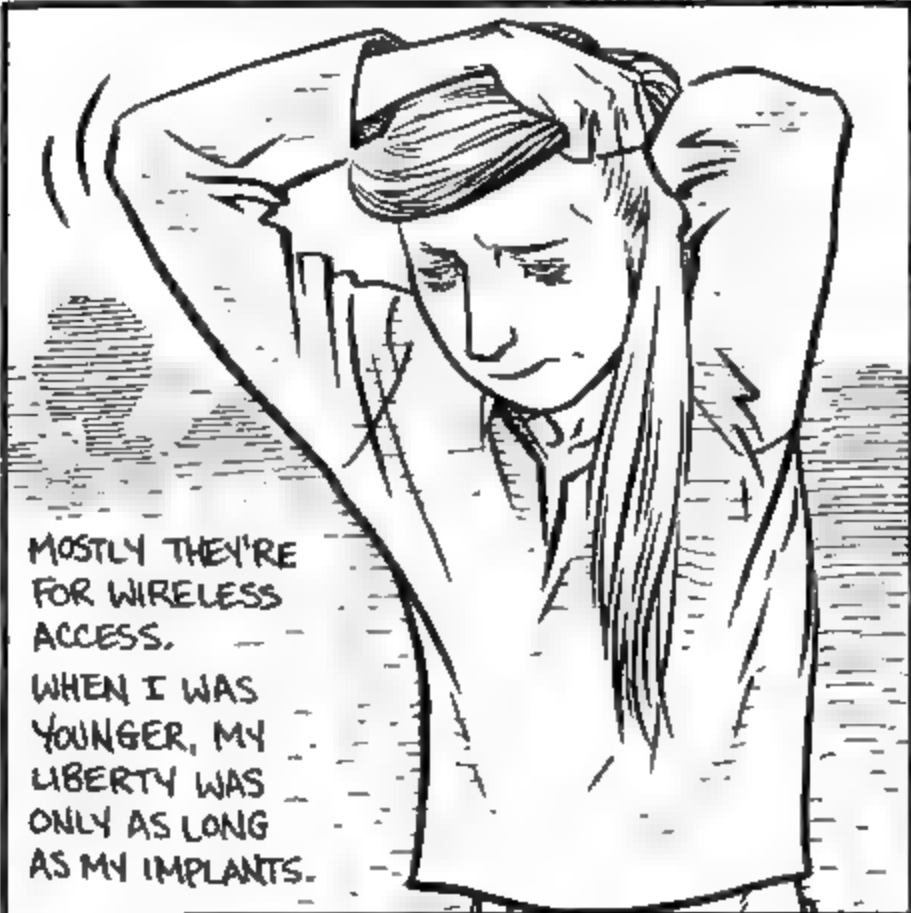
I HADN'T REALIZED
I'D LOST SO
MANY WIRES...



I KNEW IN A VAGUE WAY THAT IF I LOST TOO MANY, I WOULD ALSO LOSE MY FREEDOM.



MOSTLY THEY'RE FOR WIRELESS ACCESS. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, MY LIBERTY WAS ONLY AS LONG AS MY IMPLANTS.



I COULDN'T GET MY HANDS WARM. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT MEANT I WAS SCARED.

MAGRI WHITE!



IS YOU! I KNEW IT! COOL! WE LOVE YOUR STUFF, MAN! ALMOST DIDN'T KNOW YOU SINCE YOU CHANGED YOUR HAIR!



THESE MIGHT EVEN BE NICE GUYS, BUT I'LL NEVER KNOW, BECAUSE I'M TERRIFIED OF THEM.

BACK THEN, I NEVER KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY BEFORE I OPENED MY MOUTH.

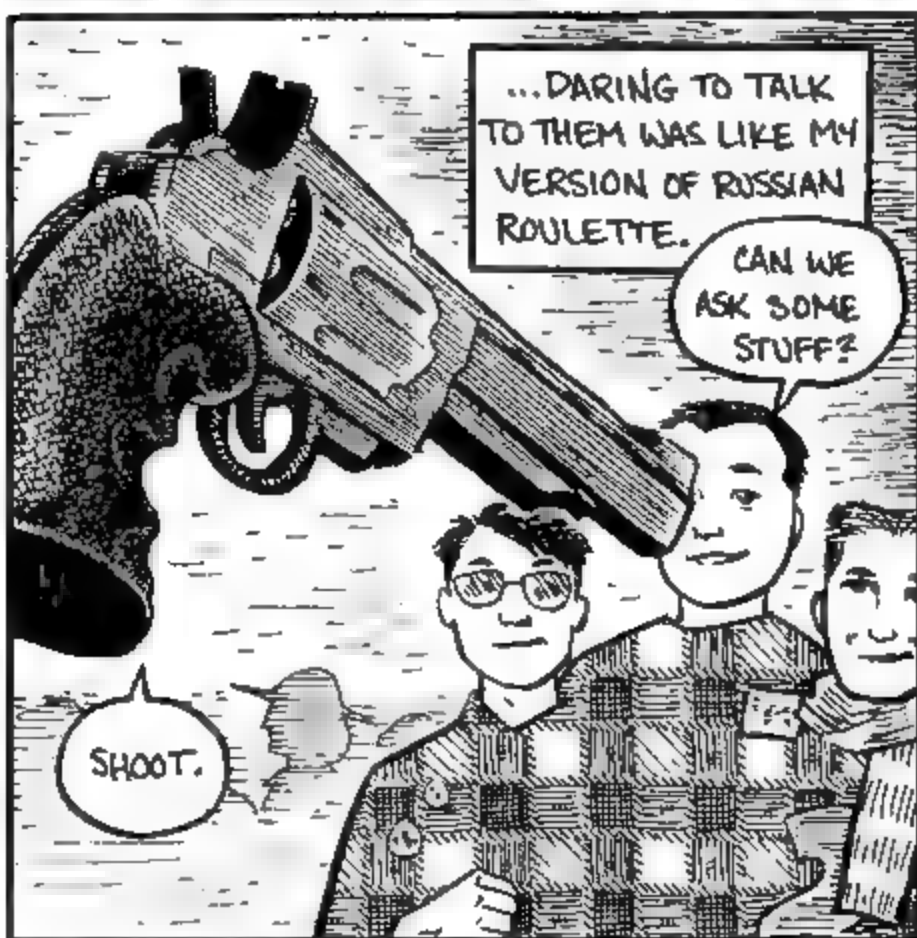


AND SINCE ANYTHING STUPID OR CRUEL I MIGHT SAY BECOMES CATAclysmically STUPID AND CRUEL IF SAID TO A VISITOR....

...DARING TO TALK TO THEM WAS LIKE MY VERSION OF RUSSIAN ROULETTE.

CAN WE ASK SOME STUFF?

SHOOT.



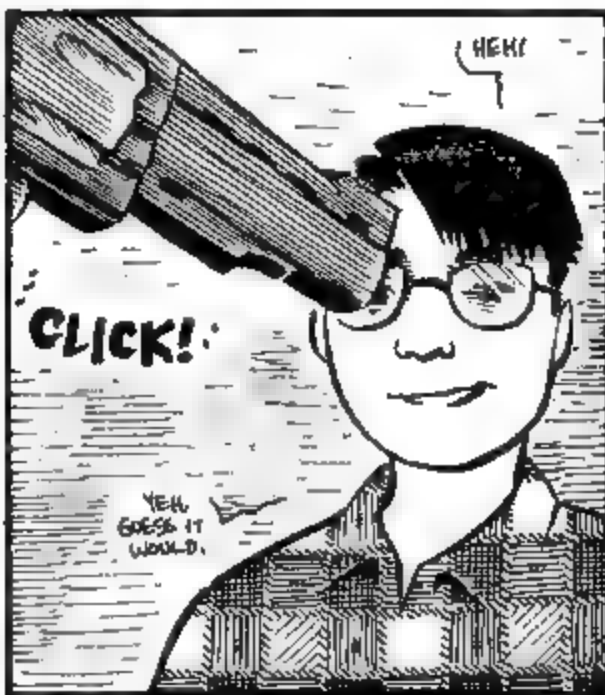


ARE YOU
ELSEWHERE
NOW?



TKLIR

NO, I'M HERE.
TO BE ELSEWHERE
NOW WOULD
BE RUDE.



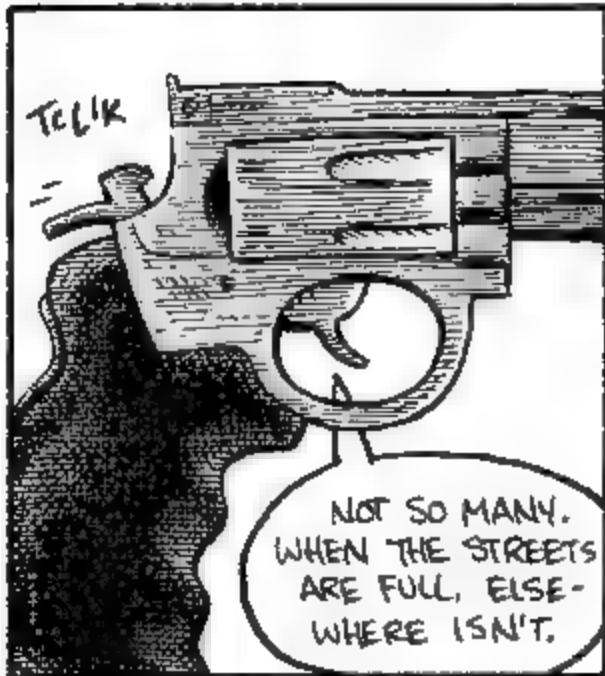
HEH!

CLICK!

YEAH,
GUESS IT
WOULD.



ARE THERE
A LOT OF
PEOPLE IN
ELSEWHERE
NOW?

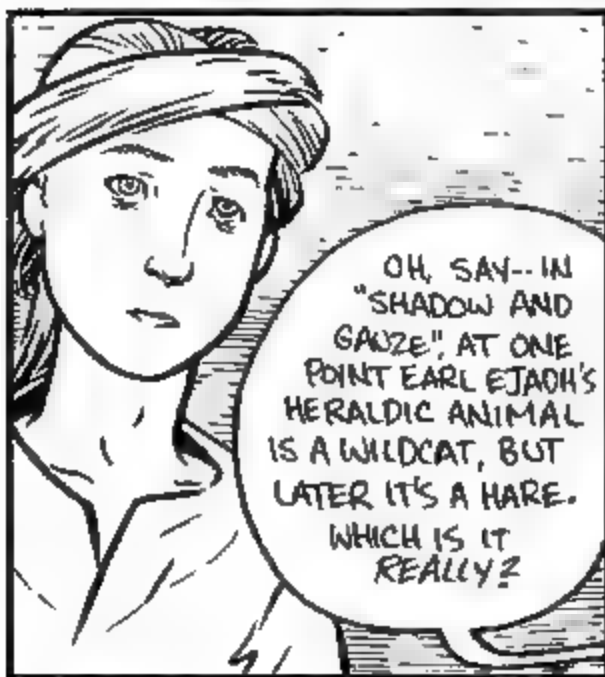


TKLIR

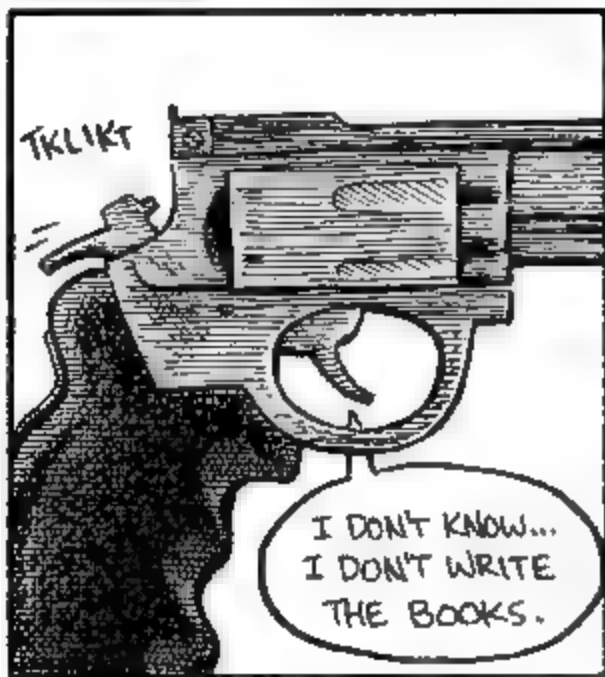
NOT SO MANY.
WHEN THE STREETS
ARE FULL, ELSE-
WHERE ISN'T.



CLICK!

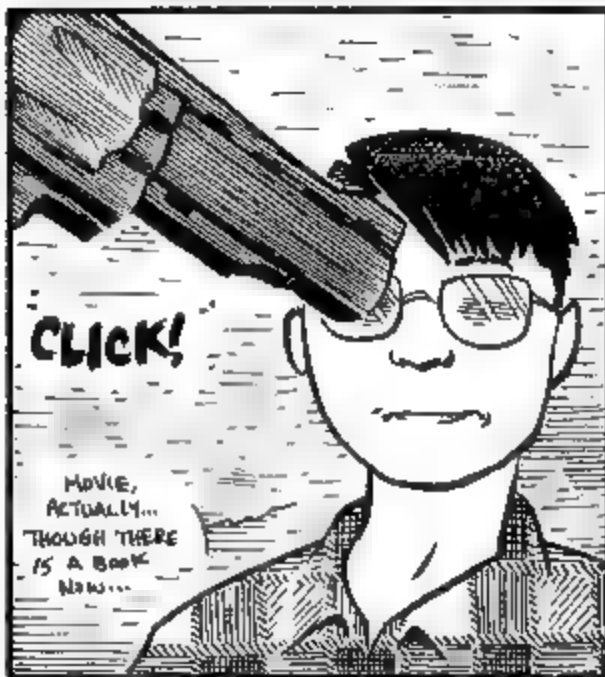


OH, SAY-- IN
"SHADOW AND
GAUZE", AT ONE
POINT EARL EJAQH'S
HERALDIC ANIMAL
IS A WILDCAT, BUT
LATER IT'S A HARE.
WHICH IS IT
REALLY?



TKLIR

I DON'T KNOW...
I DON'T WRITE
THE BOOKS.

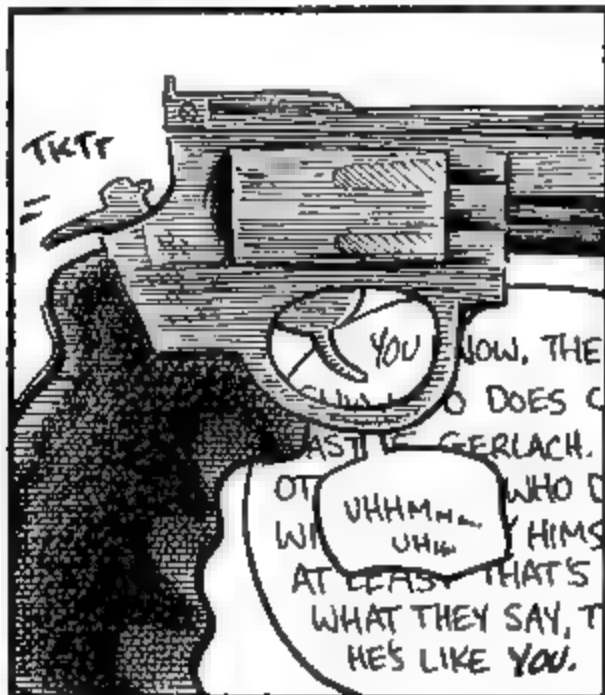


CLICK!

MOVIE,
ACTUALLY...
THOUGH THERE
IS A BOOK
NOW...

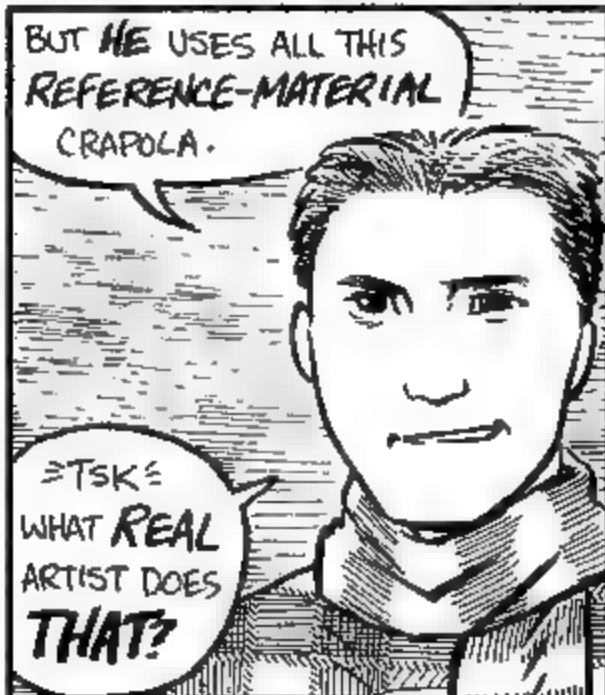


WHAT DO
YOU THINK OF
VED GINSTER
USING
PHOTOGRAPHS?



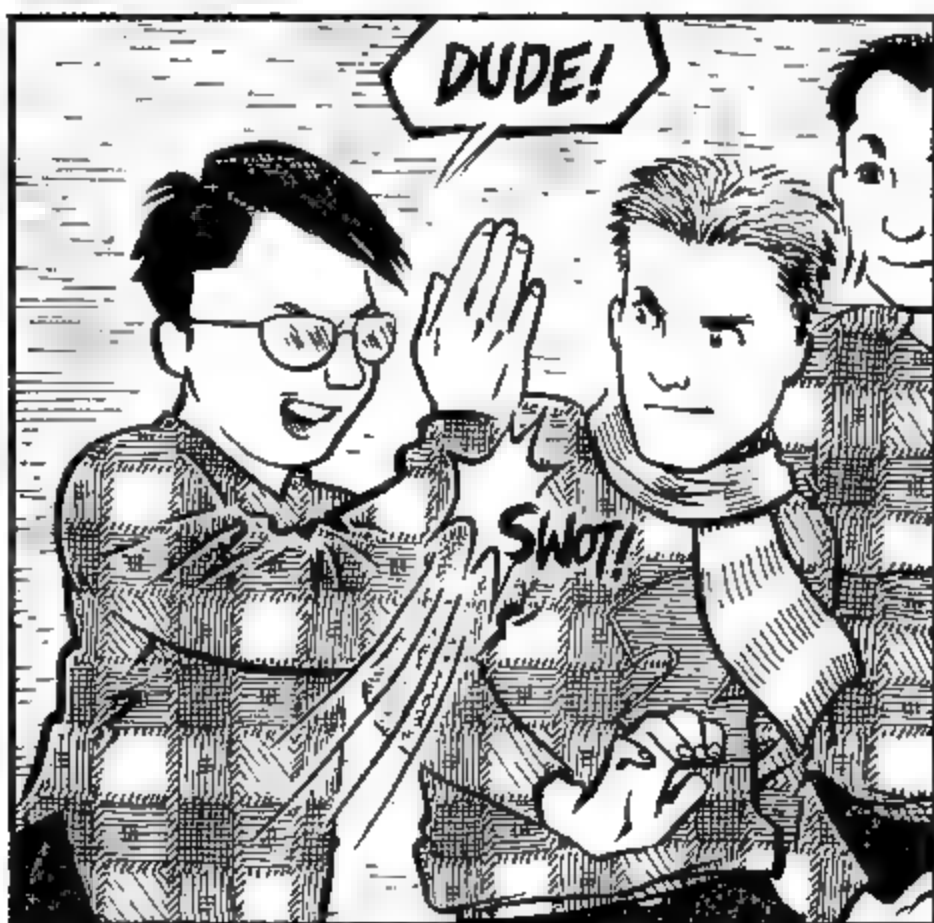
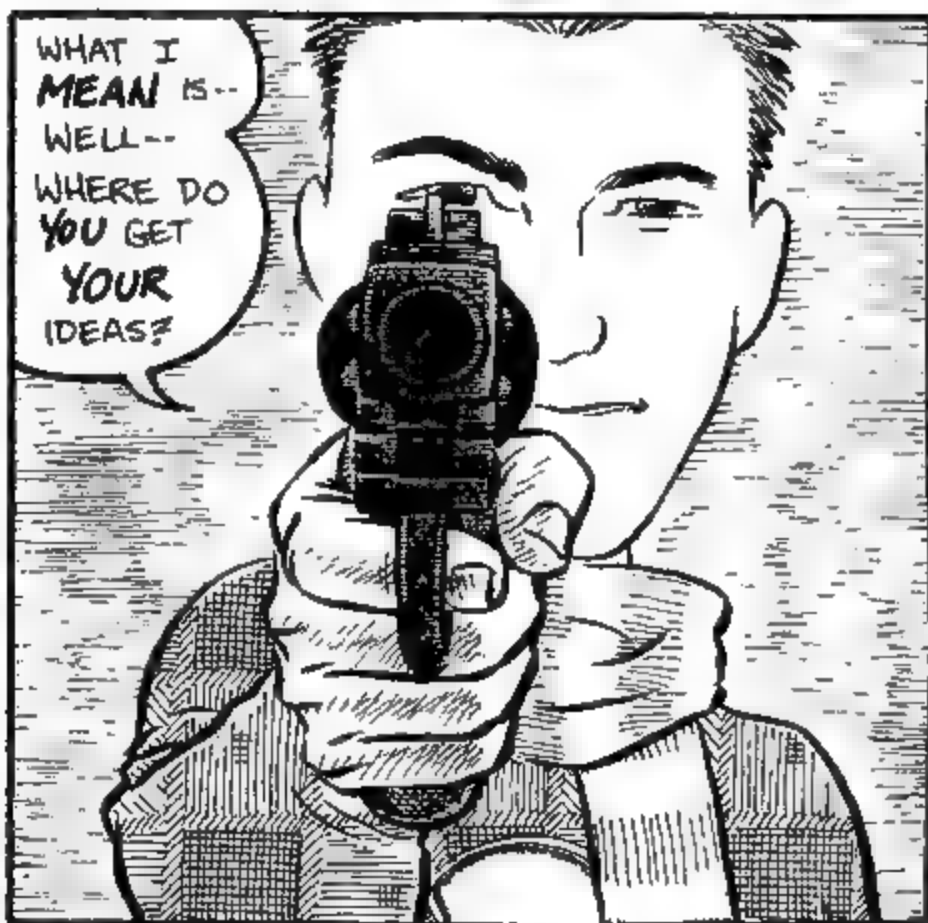
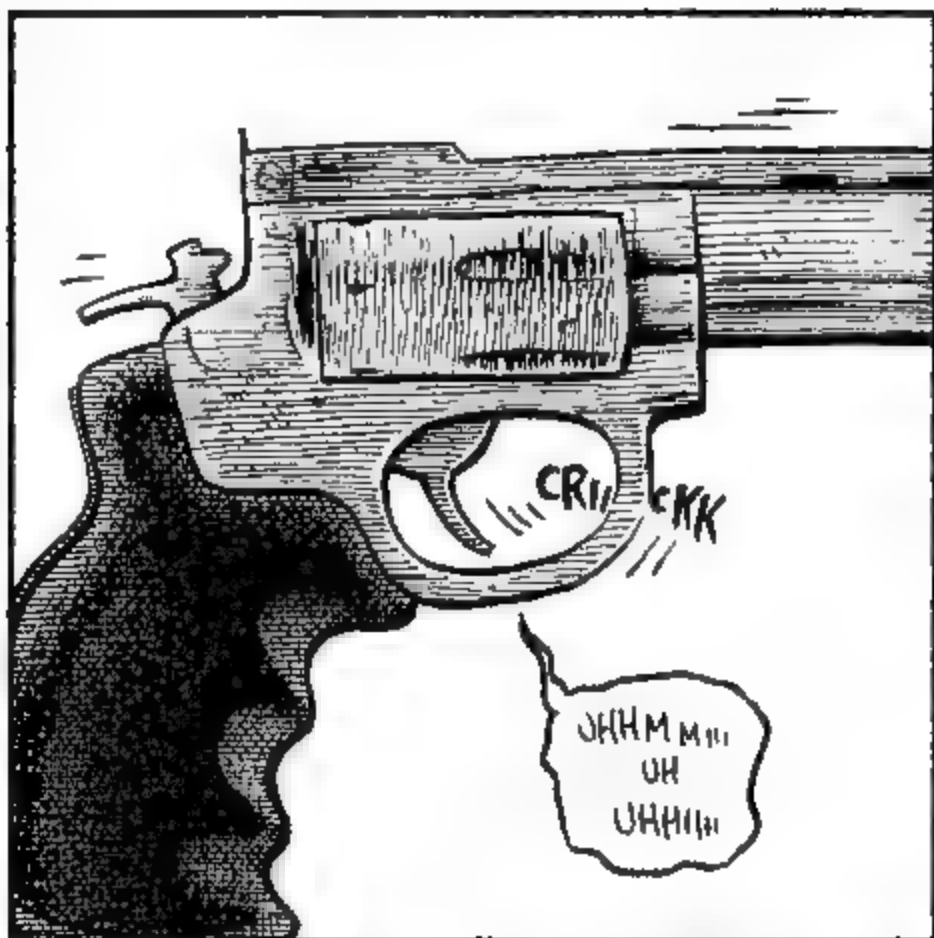
TKLIR

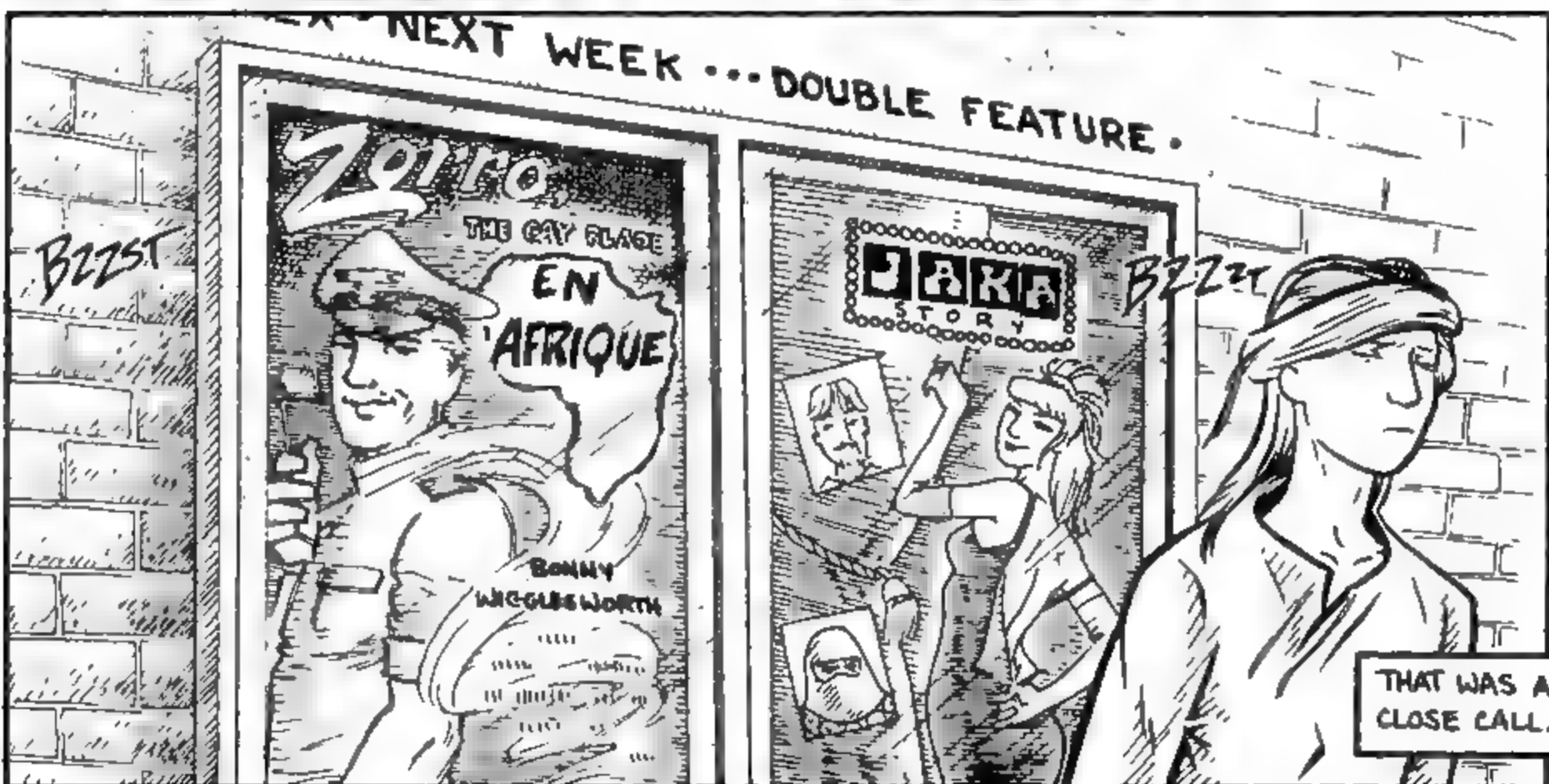
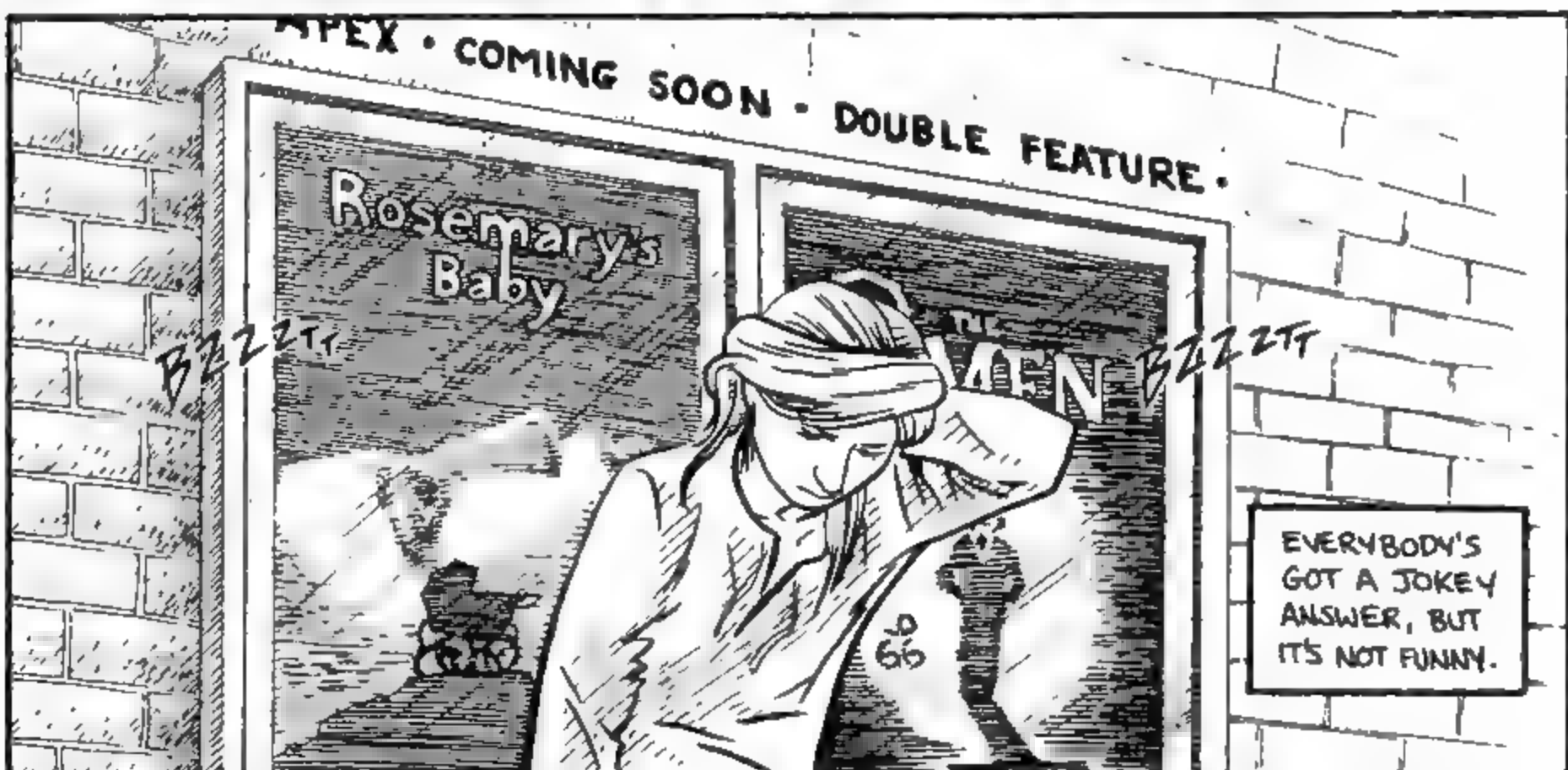
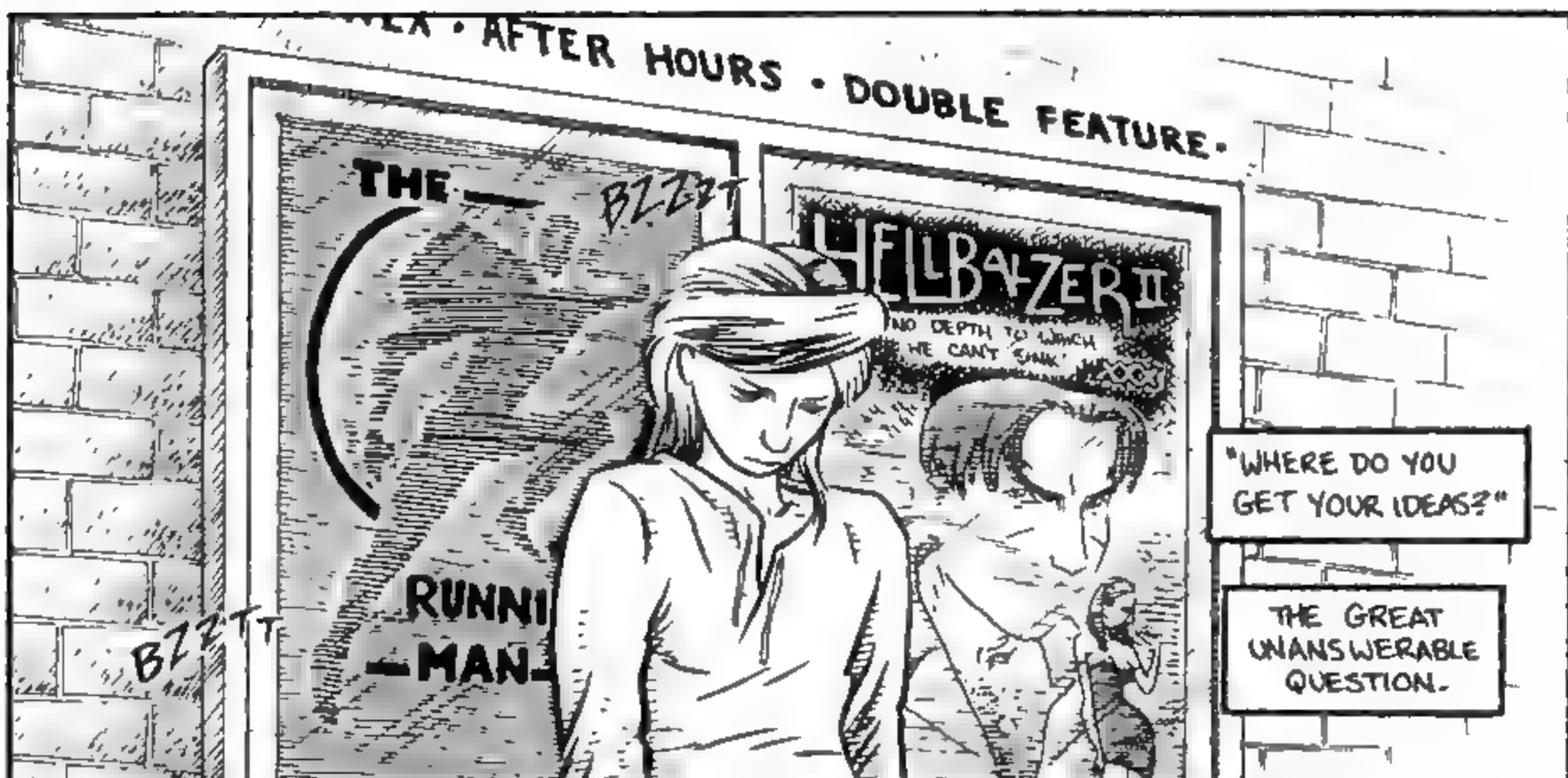
YOU NOW, THE
WHO DOES C
ASTE GERLACH.
OT WH WHO
UHHMM... HIM
AT LEAST THAT'S
WHAT THEY SAY, T
HE'S LIKE YOU.

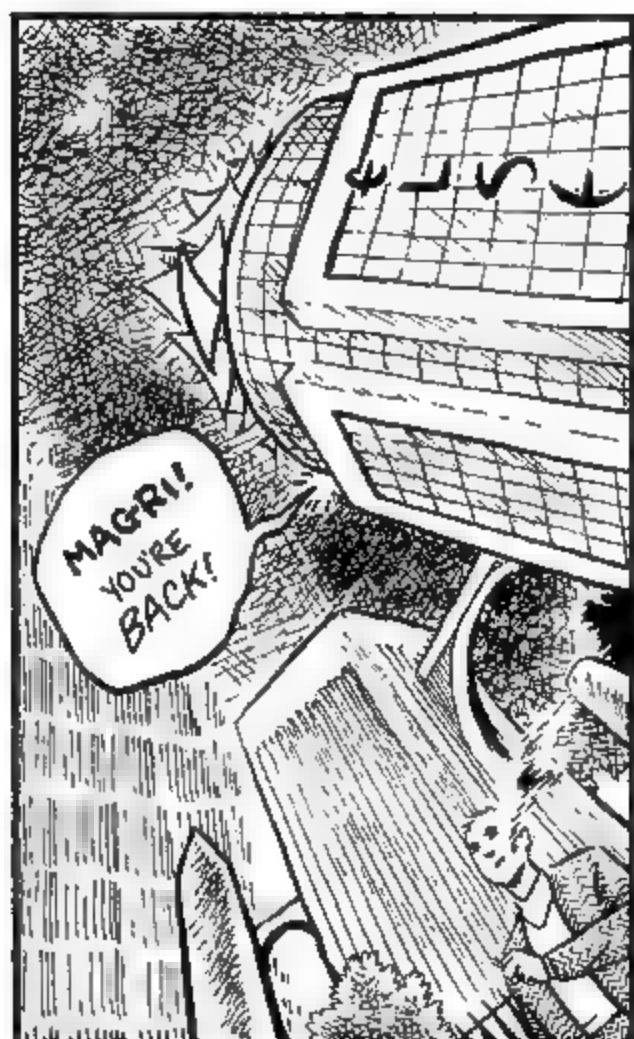


BUT HE USES ALL THIS
REFERENCE-MATERIAL
CRAPOLA.

ETSK!
WHAT REAL
ARTIST DOES
THAT?









MAGRI?

ISN'T IT AMAZING
HOW YOU CAN CHANGE
A MAN'S HAIR AND MAKE
A DIFFERENT PERSON
OUT OF HIM?

...MUST'VE GOT WIND
OF ALL THE BAD PR
COMING, AND CHANGED
HIS LOOK--



COME ON, MAGRI!
HELP US OUT HERE!
IS THIS THE GUY
WHO'S BEEN TEARING
UP YOUR VISITORS?

DON'T,
DON'T... HE'S
GONE--

I AM
NOT HERE.



BUT LOOK AT
HIS FACE-- HE
KNOWS HIM!
THIS IS THE
GUY!

I AM NOT
SEEING THIS.



ANYWAY,
HE'LL DO.

I AM
ELSEWHERE.





DON'T YOU KNOW
A GODDAMN
PHANTOM
WHEN YOU SEE ONE??

DON'T YOU THINK I
COULD **HANDLE** THIS GOD-
DAMN THING MYSELF
IF IT WAS JUST A PERSON??

HOW CAN THAT POOR FUCKIN'
NIMROD BE ANYBODY'S
MONSTER? HE DOESN'T
EVEN HAVE ANY JACKS!!

FUCK!

FUCK!

FAAAHHK!!



CHAPTER FOUR



I LIKE GETTING LOST.
WANDERING. WALKING.

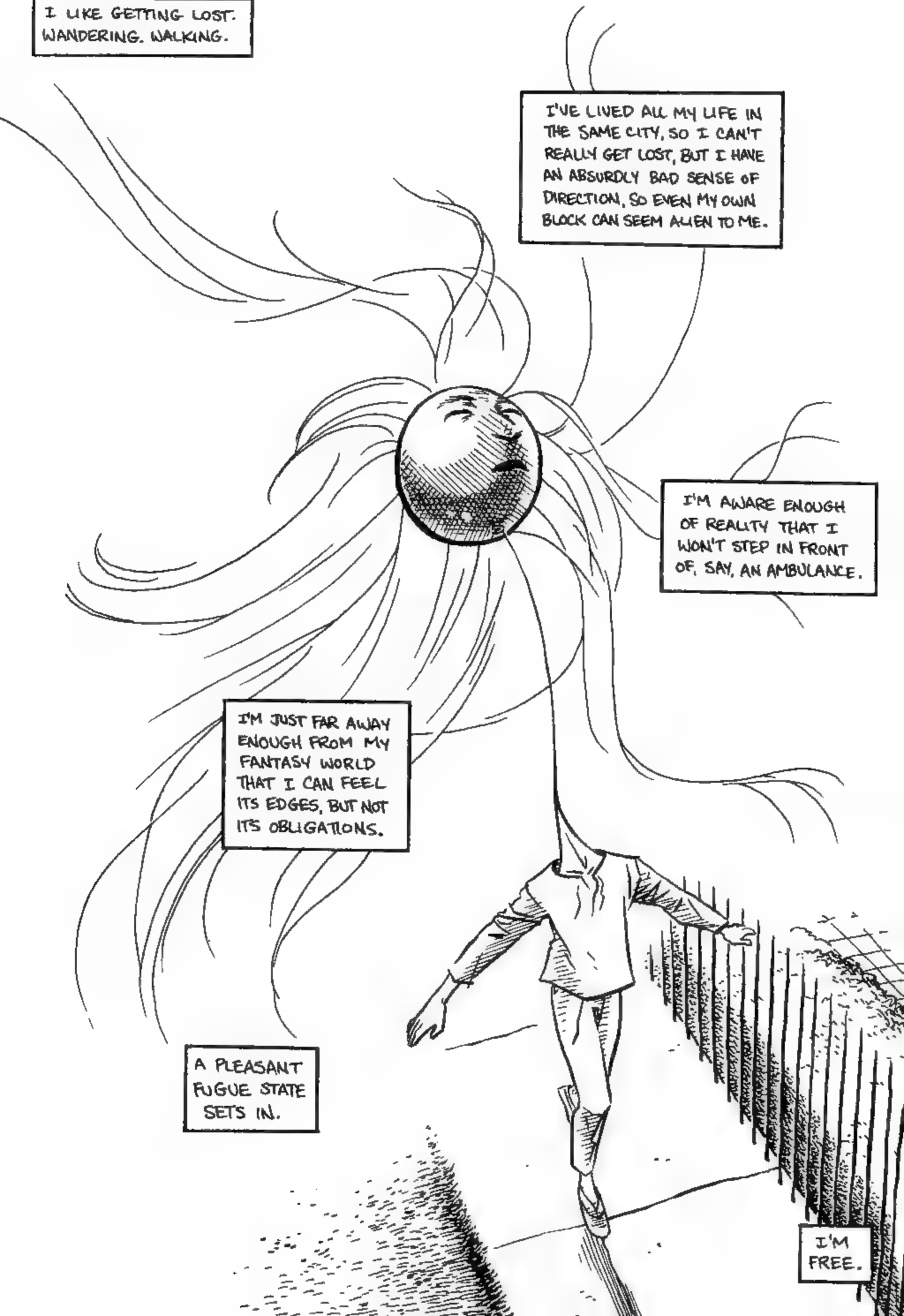
I'VE LIVED ALL MY LIFE IN
THE SAME CITY, SO I CAN'T
REALLY GET LOST, BUT I HAVE
AN ABSURDLY BAD SENSE OF
DIRECTION, SO EVEN MY OWN
BLOCK CAN SEEM ALIEN TO ME.

I'M AWARE ENOUGH
OF REALITY THAT I
WON'T STEP IN FRONT
OF, SAY, AN AMBULANCE.

I'M JUST FAR AWAY
ENOUGH FROM MY
FANTASY WORLD
THAT I CAN FEEL
ITS EDGES, BUT NOT
ITS OBLIGATIONS.

A PLEASANT
FUGUE STATE
SETS IN.

I'M
FREE.



I STICK TO THE STREETS.

I DON'T DRIFT INTO THE
SHOPS OR HOUSES OR
ANYTHING LIKE THAT.
I'M NOT LIKE THAT.

I LIKE THE MOVING
CURRENTS OF THE
STREETS.

THEY'RE A LITTLE
ANONYMOUS, ROADS;
THEY GIVE ME THAT
LITTLE TASTE OF
DISORIENTATION
THAT I LIKE.



I'M REALLY PROUD OF HOW THE STORY IN THIS ONE CAME OUT. THAT'S REALLY THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THAT GUNKY BIG-SCREEN PORN AND SLASH FICTION. SLASH HAS A STORY.

UNGG GRUNT

AND I'M REALLY GLAD I GOT TO SHOW IT TO YOU.

THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR HAVING A WORLD OF ONE'S OWN TO RETREAT INTO.

RETREAT!

RETREAT!

WHENEVER
I GO
THERE --

I ALWAYS

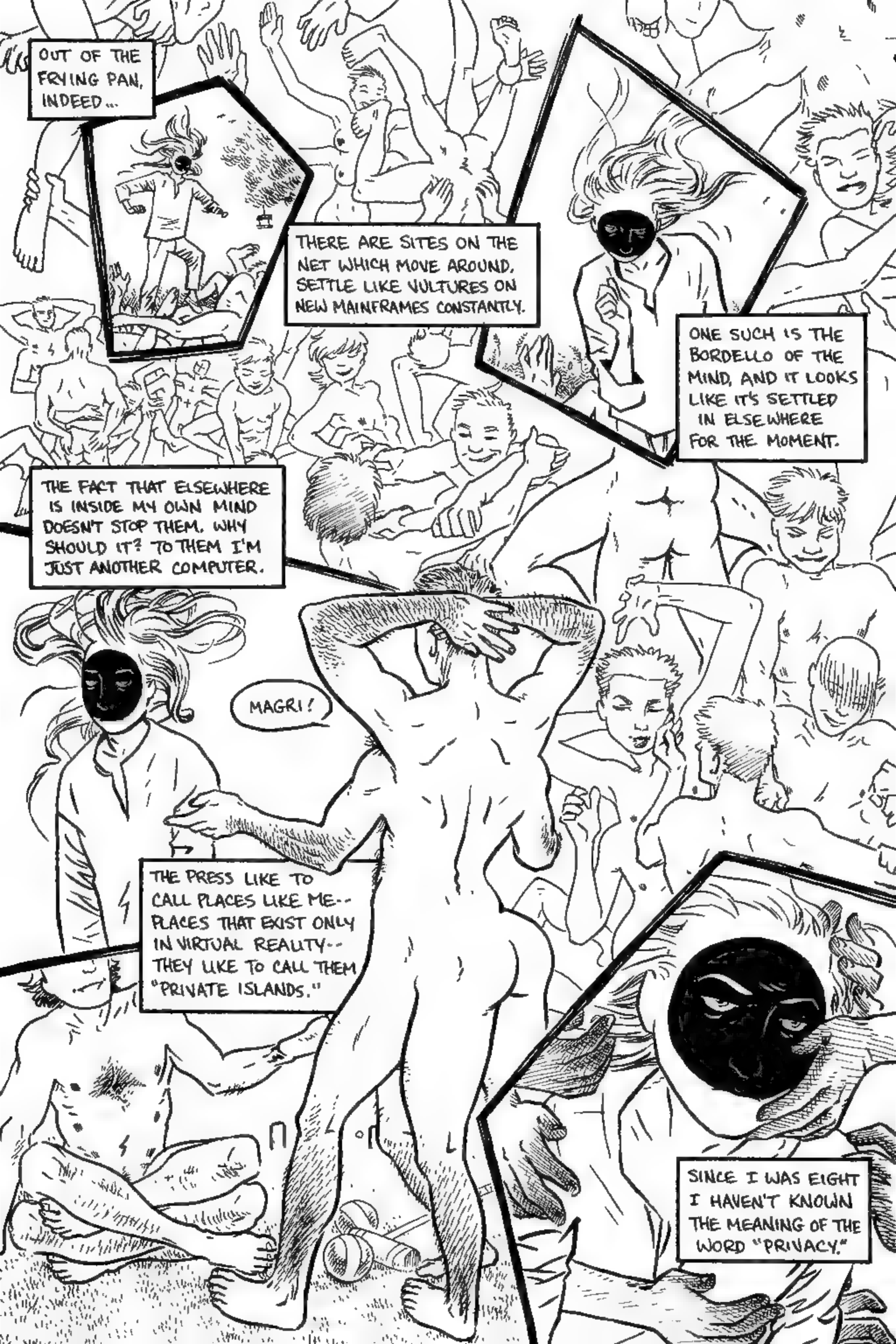


WHENEVER I
RETREAT INTO
ELSEWHERE--

I FIND MYSELF IN
THE SAME PLACE

MY FAMILY'S OLD
CROQUET LAWN

ON WHICH I
PLAYED SO MANY
LONELY GAMES
BY MYSELF--



OUT OF THE
FRYING PAN,
INDEED...

THERE ARE SITES ON THE
NET WHICH MOVE AROUND,
SETTLE LIKE VULTURES ON
NEW MAINFRAMES CONSTANTLY.

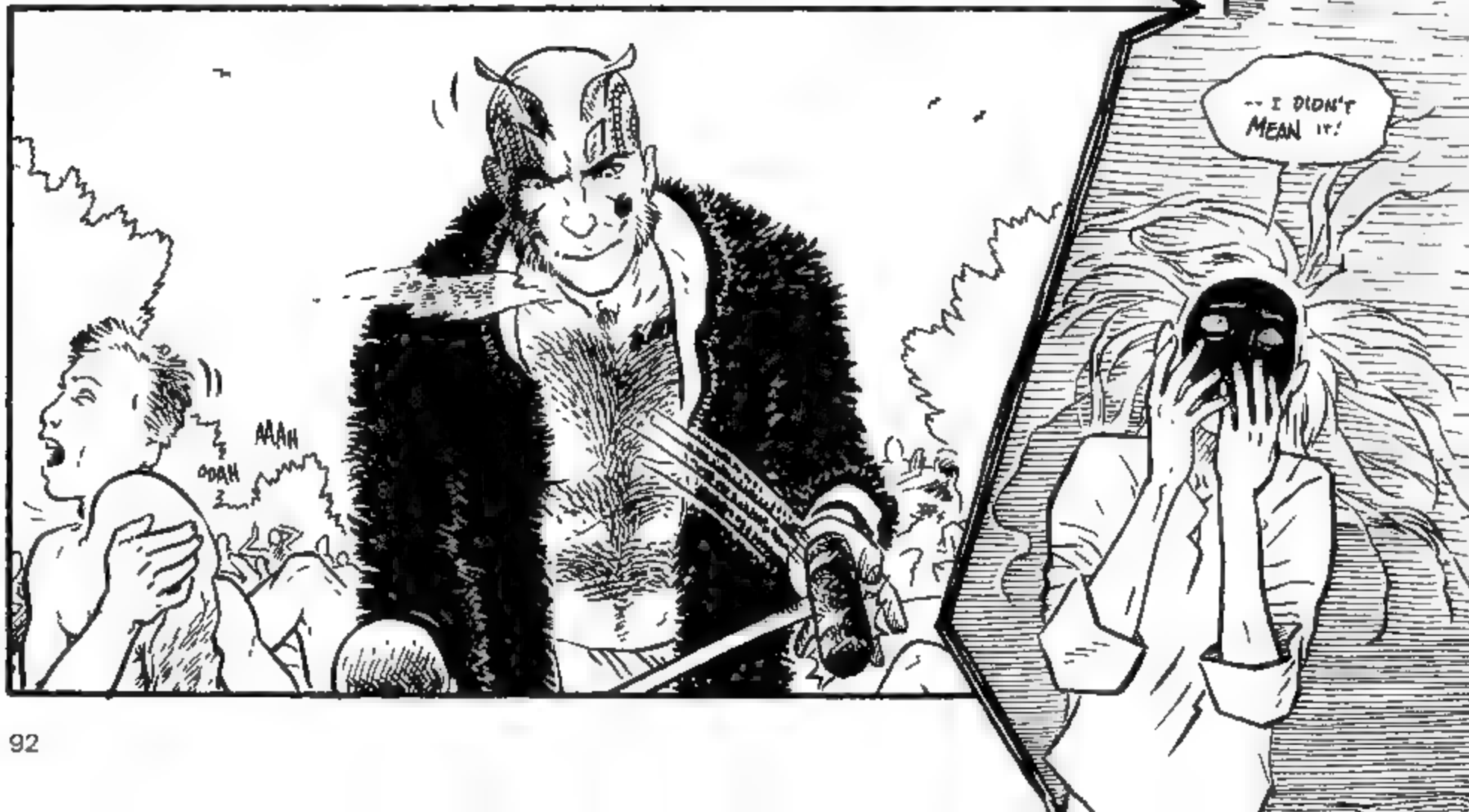
ONE SUCH IS THE
BORDELLO OF THE
MIND, AND IT LOOKS
LIKE IT'S SETTLED
IN ELSEWHERE
FOR THE MOMENT.

THE FACT THAT ELSEWHERE
IS INSIDE MY OWN MIND
DOESN'T STOP THEM. WHY
SHOULD IT? TO THEM I'M
JUST ANOTHER COMPUTER.

MAGRI!

THE PRESS LIKE TO
CALL PLACES LIKE ME--
PLACES THAT EXIST ONLY
IN VIRTUAL REALITY--
THEY LIKE TO CALL THEM
"PRIVATE ISLANDS."

SINCE I WAS EIGHT
I HAVEN'T KNOWN
THE MEANING OF THE
WORD "PRIVACY."







I'M NOT GOOD AT GROUPS.

IT'S A QUESTION OF PUBLIC PERSONA EVERY CREATIVE PERSON HAS TO PLAY THAT GAME, LIKE IT OR NOT.

I CAN'T FOLLOW ALL THE THREADS WHEN SO MANY PEOPLE TALK...

SO I KNOW WE'D PRINT ANY PINUP I DID FOR HIM, BUT I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO DO! HE DOES EVERYTHING SO WELL I DON'T SEE ANYTHING I CAN FIX!

BY THE TIME I THINK OF A THING TO SAY, THEY'RE SIX LEAPS PAST TIME TO SAY IT.

I USED TO THINK THAT EVERYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD WAS PSYCHIC.

THEY GOT IT. THEY CAN MAKE ALL THE CONNECTIONS.

LAUGH: THAT BASTARD! I WAS GOING TO TITLE MY NEXT STORY "MAGNETIC BUTT PLUG"! DAMN IT ALL, NOW I CAN'T USE IT...

DUDE, YOU DO KNOW THAT TITLES CAN'T BE COPY-RIGHTED?

Y'KNOW, YOU CAN WRITE A BOOK ABOUT PLATITUDE AND CALL IT "GONE WITH THE WIND" IF YOU'RE OF A MIND TO.

NO. STORY DOESN'T COUNT. COPYRIGHT LAWS PROTECT KEY NAMES AND ACTUAL PROSE THUSING.

IF HE CHANGED THE NAMES, AND DIDN'T LIFT THE TEXT EXACTLY, YOU'RE BONED.

OR BUT THE ENDING WAS SO STUPID. ANOTHER PSYCHIATRIST WHO JUST EXPLAINS EVERYTHING AT THE END IT'S PRETTY REALLY BUT THAT STUFF?

DOESN'T MATTER... YOU'LL NEVER GET THIS RESOLVED BY PRESS TIME ANYWAY.

DID YOU READ HIS REWRITE OF "SANCTUARY"? I HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT IT'S BETTER.

WHILE ALL I GET ARE FRAGMENTS.

SO, MAGRI...

WHAT MINDLESS CRAP HAVE YOU BEEN THINKING UP THESE DAYS?

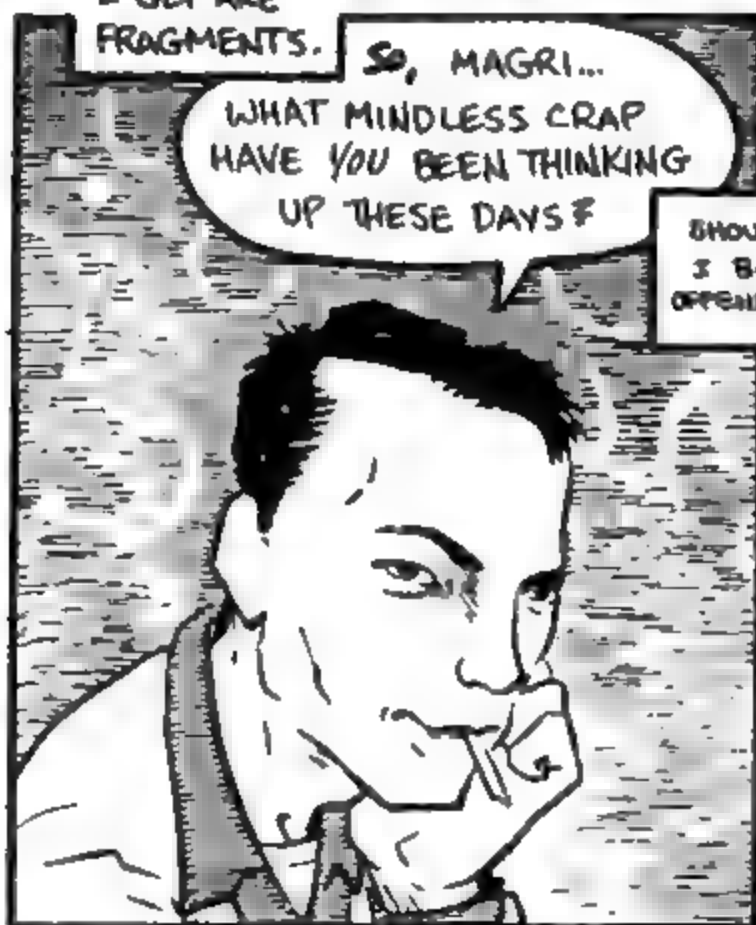
SHOULD I BE OFFENDED?

I HAVE TO ADMIT, WRITING NOVELS SET IN ELSEWHERE HAS BECOME MY GUILTY PLEASURE.

IT WAS JUST SUPPOSED TO BE HACKING... FOR THE PAYCHECK... TO KEEP ME OUT OF THE SWEATY PAWS OF THE PATRONS...

SHOULD I?

WHY NOT?



I ADMIT IT'S NEVER BEEN THIS BAD.

WHEN THE FANS PRAISE YOU, YOU CAN COP ONE OF TWO ATTITUDES:

ONE MINUTE, I'M TALKING WITH SOMEBODY, EARNESTLY TRYING TO MAKE MY POINT

A: "OH, YOU POOR FOOL, HOW CAN YOU WASTE YOUR PRECIOUS SYNAPSES ON MY SLIPSHOD DRIVE?"

...OR...

ATTITUDE B: "WALLOW AT MY FEET, MY ZOMBIE SLAVE! AH HAHAHAHAAAA!"

AND THEN THERE WILL BE A FADE-OUT

AT LEAST THE "MIND THE MERCILESS" APPROACH DOESN'T IMPLY THAT YOU THINK YOU'RE BOTH LOSERS. WHAT WE DO IS NOT BRAIN SURGERY -- WE'RE NOT SAVING LIVES HERE -- WE NEED TO KEEP OUR PERSPECTIVE.

LIKE IN A MOVIE, AND I'M ALONE. OR TALKING TO SOMEBODY ELSE.

PERSPECTIVE?

HEH -- WOULD IT BREAK YOUR JAW TO BE POLITE? TO SAY "THANK YOU" AND THEN GRACIOUSLY SHUT UP?

REY, NOBODY EVER RAISED AN ARMY WITH GRACE AND POLITENESS...

...OH NO. I NEVER DREAM. I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN FIFTEEN YEARS. YOU SEE, IN MY POSITION...

GOD! HOW CAN YOU STAND IT??

OH, I BET IT'S JUST LIKE LUCID DREAMING.

SMIFF? SMIFF

I GOT NO USE FOR THAT EITHER. I JUST WANT PEACE AND QUIET WHEN I SLEEP.

IN MY POSITION ... A PERSON IN MY POSITION ... I CAN'T...

THAT'S A CRITIC'S JOB. IT'S NOT UP TO YOU TO SAY IF YOUR WORK IS GOOD OR BAD. SO, LET OTHERS JUDGE AND CATEGORIZE.

IT ISN'T LIKE WHEN I SIDESTEP INTO ELSEWHERE. NO, THIS IS

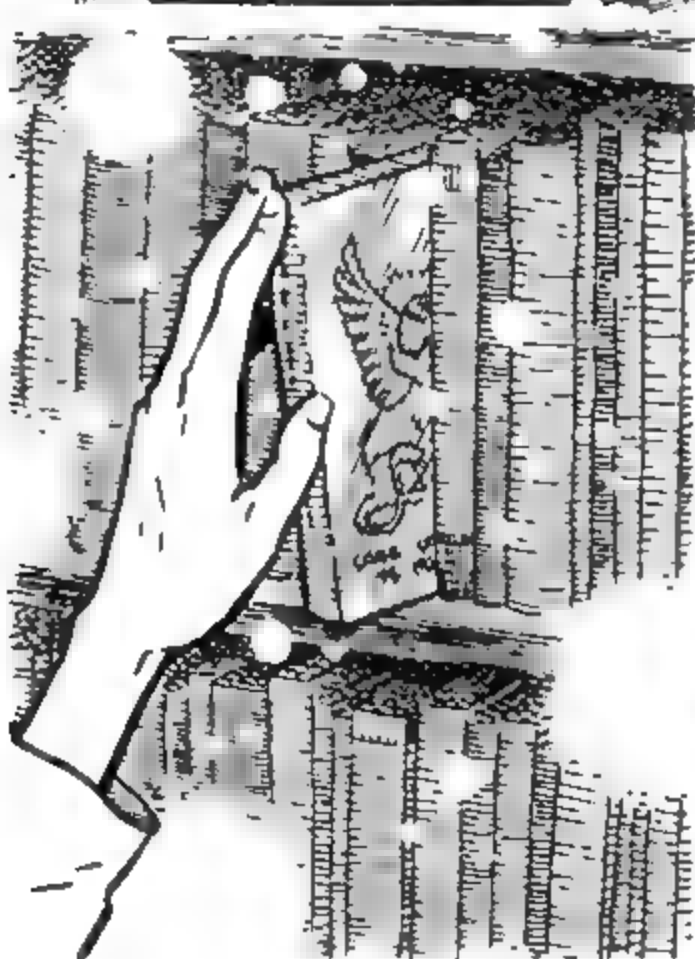
I GOT THE PERFECT QUOTE, MAN. LISTEN: "WHAT IS A TELEVISION APPARATUS TO MAN, WHO HAS ONLY TO SHUT HIS EYES TO SEE THE MOST INACCESSIBLE REGIONS OF THE SEEN AND THE NEVER SEEN, WHO HAS ONLY TO IMAGINE IN ORDER TO PIERCE THROUGH WALLS AND CAUSE ALL THE PLANETARY BAGDADS OF HIS DREAMS TO RISE FROM THE DUST."

WOW, THAT IS GOOD. YOU'RE GONNA OPEN THE SHOW WITH THAT WHO SAID IT?

I DUNNO. THINK THAT'S A PROBLEM?

HEH! I JUST READ A SHORT STORY ABOUT A MUSE WHO GAVE TWO DIFFERENT GUYS THE SAME INSPIRATION, SO THEY WERE SUING HER FOR COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT. WOULD'VE BEEN A LOT FUNNIER IF I HADN'T PUT SOMETHING JUST LIKE THAT IN AN OPENED PIECE I'D JUST HIT THE SUBMIT KEY ON.

VERY STRANGE.





BLANK?

BUT...

THEY
HAVE
TITLES...

IT'S
CRAZY!
WHY??

THE OWNER, IT'S JUST HER THING.
SHE'S BEEN HAND BINDING BLANK
BOOKS AS A HOBBY
SINCE SHE WAS IN
HER TEENS.

SHE
WRITES;
SHE SAYS SHE'S
GOOD AT TITLES
AND FIRST LINES
BUT THAT'S
ALL.

SO
PICK
ONE!

SHE LIKES IT WHEN
WRITERS, ARTISTS--
CREATIVE FOLKS, ANY-
WAY-- IF YOU LIKE
THAT ONE, YOU CAN
KEEP IT.

KEEP
IT?

WHAT WOULD
I DO WITH IT?



WHAT
INDEED?

THROUGH THE HAZE

"WRITERS ARE LIARS, MY DEAR."

ROOT WORD IS "CORPUS," IT MEANS "BODY." A CORPORATION IS A LEGAL ENTITY. A PERSON. IT EARNES INCOME. IT OWES TAXES. IT HAS DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS.

ONE SET OF VOICES DEFENDS TO THE DEATH THEIR CREDITS AS PROFESSIONALS.

NEVER CREATE AN ENTITY WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE REPERCUSSIONS.

I'M HEARING WRITERS TALK ARCHLY ABOUT WRITING STORIES ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO WRITE.

JAN, YOU KNOW THERE ARE A LOT OF DOWNSIDES TO GETTING INCORPORATED, DON'T YOU? YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT JUST TO LEGITIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS.

ANOTHER SET DENIES ALL CLAIM TO ORIGINALITY IN ORDER TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE BOOKS THEY WRITE ABOUT.

IT'S LIKE RAISING DEMONS. NEVER SUMMON THAT WHICH YOU CANNOT DISMISS.

JOHN WYNDHAM STOLE MY IDEA. WHAT??

LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS OF AN ADVENTURE GAME BEING PLAYED IN A BACK BOOTH: ROARS, CLANGS, AND BEEPS AS REPETITIVE AS BIRD SONG.

NO, HE DID. I THOUGHT OF HAVING ALIENS INVADE BY IMPREGNATING THE LOCAL WOMEN. WYNDHAM DID THAT IN "THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS."

GEORGE, WYNDHAM'S BOOK WAS PUBLISHED AGES AGO.

IT'S STILL MY IDEA. I NEVER READ "MIDWICH." I STILL HAVEN'T. IT'S TOO GOOD AN IDEA TO GIVE UP ON.

.. IT'S THIS LITTLE CREATURE, YOU KNOW, LIKE A PACK RAT. THEY GO BACK TO ITS BURROW, AND IT'S FULL OF STUFF, FANTASTIC STUFF. WAY UP HIGH, HALF-HIDDEN, IS A JAR WITH A LIGHT INSIDE, AND A LABEL: "STOLEN IDEAS." BOY, DID THAT EVER GIVE ME THE CHILLS.

OH REALLY? WHY'S THAT?

... FUCK YOU, MAN.

THROUGH THE HAZE

DID YOU SEE YESTERDAY'S "SWIPE FILES"? WOTTA LAUGH.

MAGRI? IS IT REALLY YOU?

BRENAIRE'S KNOWN FOR COMING UP WITH THESE INSANELY COMPLEX INTERPRETATIONS OF BOOKS, MOVIES, PLAYS, ART-- WHATEVER HE LIKES-- IN HIS REVIEWS, LOVE IT OR HATE IT, HE WILL SEE SOME SHIT IN IT. IT'S AMAZING. COURSE, HE'S DEAD WRONG.

IS HE?

SHIT YEAH, NO WRITER ANALYZES THAT MUCH. YOU CAN'T. THE STRUCTURE HE SEES ISN'T INTENTIONAL. AS CLEVER AS A REVIEW MAY BE, IT NEVER LEADS IDEAS THE OTHER WAY. NO REVIEW EVER LED TO A NOVEL.

CRITICS AND HISTORIANS ARE ENGAGED IN CREATION ON THE RECEIVING END. THEY MAKE UP ALL THIS COMPLEX SYMBOLIC STRUCTURE IN RESPONSE. SO... BY THAT ARGUMENT... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAN FICTION AND LITERARY CRITICISM?

SHUT UP.



SHE INTRODUCES HERSELF
(I FORGET INSTANTLY)

--SO GLAD TO SEE
YOU HERE AT LAST!
I WAS BEGINNING

(TALKING ABOUT
HOW MUCH SHE'S
ENJOYING
ELSEWHERE)

--NOW THAT MY
LAWYER'S GIVEN UP
TRYING TO KEEP ME
OUT, HEH--

(SHE'S ONLY JUST
DEVELOPED A TASTE
FOR VIRTUAL REALITY
AND BLAMES ME)

HAHA

--TRIED TO STAY AWAY, BUT
IT'S JUST TOO INTERESTING-- YOU
KNOW HOW IT IS, GOT TO GO WHERE
YOUR IMAGINATION LEADS YOU--

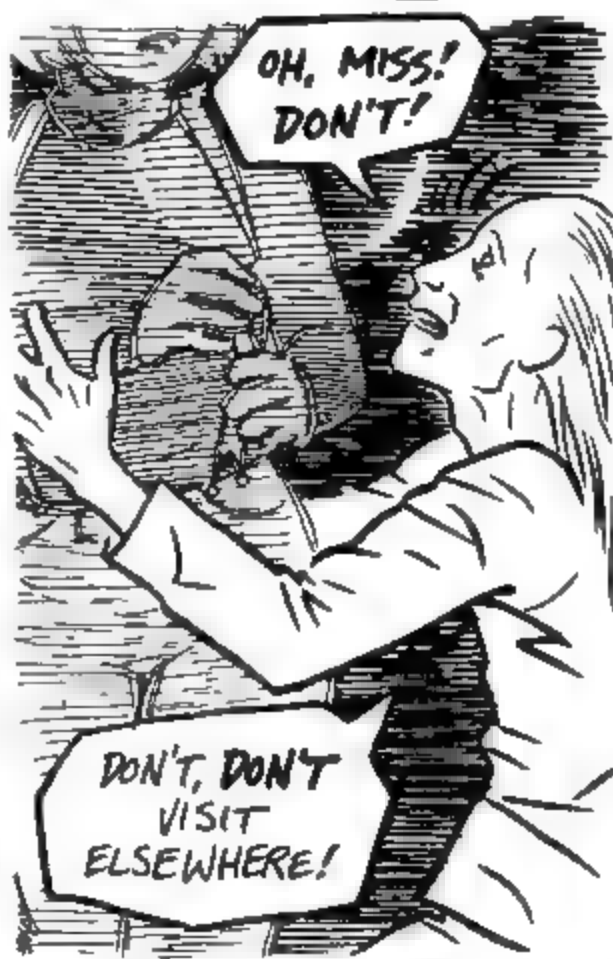
(SHE'S GOING HOME NOW,
PROBABLY TO GO ONLINE)



(SHE HOPES I'LL VISIT
HER ELSEWHERE (??)
OFTEN FROM NOW ON...)

(AND SHE'S
GOING...)

I SHOULD



OH, MISS!
DON'T!

DON'T, DON'T
VISIT
ELSEWHERE!



I'VE...
I'VE PICKED
UP SOME MONSTER--
IT'S RUNNING LOOSE IN--
SIDE MY HEAD--IT'LL TEAR
YOU APART IF IT FINDS YOU--



I'M SO
SORRY. I
USED TO BE
SUCH A NICE
PLACE. DON'T
GO--



--BUT, BUT NOW I'VE TOLD
YOU, COULD YOU PLEASE, PLEASE
NOT TELL ANYONE ELSE! THOUSANDS
OF PEOPLE ARE EMPLOYED BY THE
CORPORATION. THEY NEED ELSEWHERE,
AND IF THIS GETS OUT THEY'RE ALL
IN SERIOUS TROUBLE--



I KNOW IT'S
THE DUTY OF ANY
RESPONSIBLE ADULT
TO GO TO THE PRESS
BUT, BUT... I
BEG YOU...



OF COURSE, ULTIMATELY, I'M TAKEN FROM A FRIEND OF THE ARTIST. MOST LIKELY. SO I'M PROBABLY OKAY. BUT THEN I'M NOT A MAJOR PLAYER, AFTER ALL. NOT LIKE YOU.



I WON'T BELIEVE YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM.



I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN READING.



YOU SEE, I WAS INCORPORATED FROM ANOTHER STORY. NOT THE IDEA OF ME, MY CHARACTER, BUT ONLY MY FACE. LIKE AN ACTOR PLAYING A NEW ROLE.

BUT THE ARTIST WHO DREW ME HAD TAKEN LIBERTIES. I WAS PLAYING A SUPERNATURAL BEING, SO HE EXAGGERATED MY FEATURES THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE BOOK.



I IMAGINE THAT'S WHY I LOOK A LITTLE ODD NOW. A LITTLE INCONSISTENT. I'M A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PHOTOGRAPH.



...BUT I MUST SAY, THAT "STUNNED BABY BIRD" BIT REALLY ISN'T GOING TO GET YOU MUCH FURTHER.

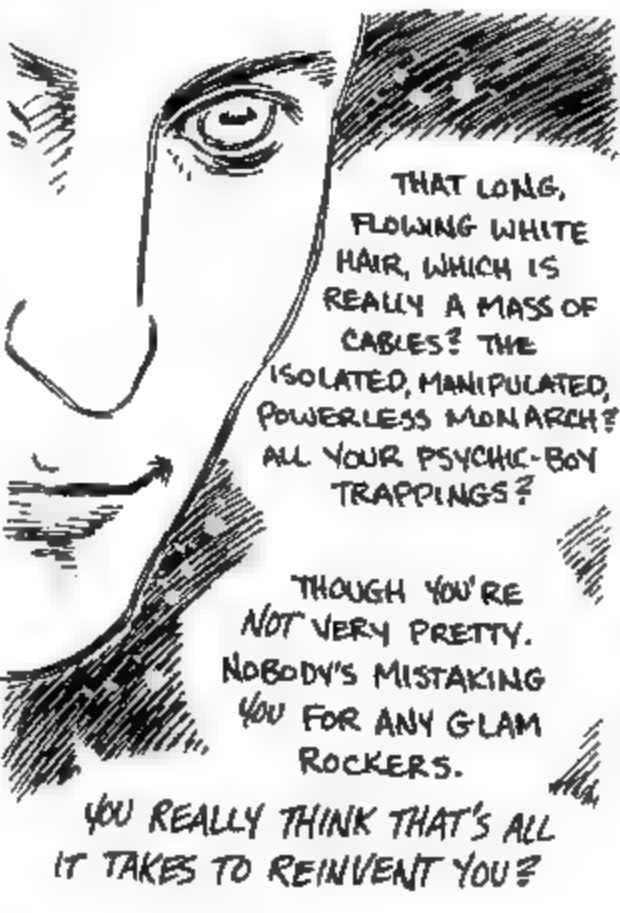
YOU CAN'T FEIGN IGNORANCE TO AVOID QUESTIONS FOREVER. YOUR FLAKY-ARTIST PERSONA IS ALREADY IRRITATING TO SOME PEOPLE. IT'S A CLICHÉ, AND NOT A FUN ONE.

WHAT?

(IS THIS A CRITIC?)

(A READER?)

(A CREATOR?)



THAT LONG, FLOWING WHITE HAIR, WHICH IS REALLY A MASS OF CABLES? THE ISOLATED, MANIPULATED, POWERLESS MONARCH? ALL YOUR PSYCHIC-BOY TRAPPINGS?

THOUGH YOU'RE NOT VERY PRETTY. NOBODY'S MISTAKING YOU FOR ANY GLAM ROCKERS.

YOU REALLY THINK THAT'S ALL IT TAKES TO REINVENT YOU?

HE'S MAD!



AND OF COURSE MUCH MORE WENT INTO YOU. YOU SHOULD ADMIT IT, IF ONLY TO YOURSELF.

HE THINKS HE'S GETTING SOMEWHERE BUT THAT PLOT IS A CIRCLE NOT A SPIRAL - IT'S PATHETIC WHEN A WRITER GETS SO REPETITIVE -- ONE-HIT WONDER ONE-TRICK PONY

TWO SCREENS SHOWING THE SAME IMAGE: ONE PHOTO-REALISTIC, ONE FLAT-COLOR ANIMATED LINES. TWO IDENTICAL GIRLS, HUDDLED FETAL IN BATHTUBS, SCREAMING THUNDER HEADS INTO THE HOT WATER. WHEN WAS THIS PUBLISHED?

EITHER YOU'RE DIVINELY INSPIRED OR YOU'RE A PLAGIARIST --OR IS THAT A "RIFF"? A "SAMPLE"? AN "INSPIRATION"? AN "HOMAGE"? AN "INCLUDED ELEMENT"?

YOU'VE LIVED IN THIS CITY ALL YOUR LIFE, DOING NOTHING, GOING NOWHERE, STEWING IN YOUR OWN SKILL. YOU'VE NEVER SEEN WIDE-OPEN SPACES. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT, YA FAKER?

EVERYBODY GOES THROUGH THIS. NO HUM. SOONER OR LATER YOU'LL GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM. MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

--DOES ENDLESS FANFIC ABOUT THIS INCREDIBLY... SIMPLE KIDS SHOW HE'S CREATED A VOLUPTUOUSLY ELABORATE BACKGROUND WORLD FOR THESE STUPID CHARACTERS, COMPLETE WITH LANGUAGE, CASTE SYSTEM, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, DIURNAL CYCLE...EVERYTHING... IT WAS... SO COMPLEX, LIKE A MINIATURE BRILLIANT-CUT DIAMOND... I ONCE TRIED TO SUGGEST THAT WHAT HE HAD MADE WAS SO MUCH MORE THAN ITS ORIGINS, HE SHOULD JUST CHANGE THE NAMES AND PUBLISH-- HE GOT SO MAD AT ME, ASKED HOW I COULD EVER SUGGEST HE SHOULD DISGUISE THE SOURCE OF HIS MATERIAL... WHAT DID I TAKE HIM FOR, A PLAGIARIST? HE WAS JUST HAPPY TO BE ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THE SHIP TH...

--SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE VIDEO GAME-- SOMEBODY HANDS THE CONTROLLER TO A NEW PLAYER AND IT WAS--

ALL STATIC, ALL NOISE, NO SIGNAL

PLAYS AND MUSIC CAN BE REINTERPRETED EVERY TIME BY EACH NEW PLAYER. BOOKS ARE ETERNAL. MOVIES ARE ENDLESSLY REMADE AND REMADE, JUST CHAFF IN THE WIND--

YOU WERE TRYING TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE. YOU COULD NOT DO THIS ON YOUR OWN. I LOOK LIKE YOU WANT TO LOOK, I FUCK LIKE YOU WANT TO FUCK, I AM SMART, CAPABLE, AND MOST OF ALL, I AM FREE IN ALL THE WAYS YOU ARE NOT.

IF YOU'RE NOT A THIEF YOU'RE A FAKER! THERE ARE NO NEW IDEAS AND EVERYBODY ELSE HAS BETTER APPROACHES!

I SEE EIGHT BOOKS ON THE SHELF WITH THE SAME TITLE. THEN THERE ARE REMAKES, JUST AS MOVIES ARE REMAKES --CHECK THE AUTHOR'S NAME IF YOU WANT TO BE SURE WHICH VERSION YOU'RE GETTING-- GET COLD CHILLS EVERY TIME

ADMIT IT! YOU'RE A SWIPE! A THIEF! A LIFT! A MAGGOT, EATING OTHER PEOPLE'S WORK!

WRITING HAS MADE ME A BETTER READER. I SEE MORE NOW. MORE WHAT? IT'S MADE YOU A BETTER CONSUMER.

BUT WHAT ARE YOU CONSUMING? MORE TO STEAL, MORE TO POLLUTE YOUR VISION. SHIT, HOW ELSE DO YOU GET THE JUICES TO FLOW? I DON'T CARE HOW BIZARRELY PSEUDO-JUNGIAN HIS INTERPRETATIONS ARE. IT'S THE ONLY POSITIVE FEEDBACK I GET. HAPPY READERS DON'T WRITE YOU KNOW IT'S YOUR OWN WHEN YOU CAN'T REMEMBER WHERE IT CAME FROM. WHEN IT'S SO OLD IT BEGINS NEW AGAIN. WHEN IT HAS THE POWER TO MOVE YOU AGAIN WHEN IT TRANSFORMS ITSELF SUDDENLY FROM

TRANSIENT CONCEPTS PICKED UP PUT DOWN JUGGLE

WHERE DID I GET IT? HOW DID I GET IT? HOW DO I GET RID OF IT? HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN IT'S GONE? HOW DO I GET IT BACK? WHAT IS IT?

REPETITION IS A TOOL. REPETITIVENESS IS A TRAP.

CAN NEVER REALLY BE YOURS.

EVERYBODY DOESN'T THINK THEY'RE THE ONLY ONES ON EARTH WHO HAVE EVER READ THAT BOOK?

EVERY GENERATION TROTS OUT THE SAME IDEAS EXCEPT IN NEW WORDS HOW CAN YOU BLAME THEM FOR

GO AHEAD.

IF YOU ADMIT IT, YOU CAN CALL IT AN INFLUENCE.

WHY DO ORIGIN STORIES NEVER COME FIRST?

IT'S LATE IN THE CYCLE FOR BUILT-CHILD STORIES. WE OUGHT TO START SEEING OUT-OF-CONTROL TEEN-MONSTER STORIES NOW--

NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'LL FIND WHEN YOU START TURNING OVER ROCKS BUT YOU CAN'T EXPECT IT TO BE ANYTHING GOOD

YES, THAT SCENE FOR WHICH OUR GRAND OLD MAN IS JUSTLY FAMOUS ALSO APPEARED IN A MOVIE CALLED "THE GLASS KEY." THE GUY WORKED A LOT IN THE PULPS AND A LOT OF MOVIES CAME FROM THE PULPS TOO SO WHO CAN SAY? AND ANYWAY HE DID IT BRILLIANTLY, ADVANCED THE MEDIUM, DID IT HIS

DO IT YOUR WAY. MAKE IT YOUR OWN.


YOUR OWN POINT OF VIEW MAKES THE DIFFERENCE. YOU ARE A BEAUTIFUL UNIQUE REMPLACEMENT

OH, THE SUSPENSE IS TERRIBLE! I HOPE IT'LL LAST--

I-- I JUST DO WHAT I LIKE--








LYING IN THE
BACK SEAT

DARK IS SUCH
A NICE COLOR TO
MY TIRED EYES


LEATHER UPHOLSTERY
SOFT BUT LIKE ARMOR
THE BODY BARELY
SINKS INTO IT



LYING IN THE
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DARK AND QUIET

STREETLAMPS
RISE AND SET

RISE AND SET

MUST BE IN A
NIGHT-CYCLE
NEIGHBORHOOD
--NO HONKING,
NO NOISE



DARK AND QUIET

STREETLAMPS
RISE AND SET

RISE AND SET

MUST BE IN A
NIGHT-CYCLE
NEIGHBORHOOD
--NO HONKING,
NO NOISE



DARK AND QUIET

STREETLAMPS
RISE AND SET

RISE AND SET

MUST BE IN A
NIGHT-CYCLE
NEIGHBORHOOD
--NO HONKING,
NO NOISE

HAVEN'T FELT LIKE
THIS FOR SO LONG.

I'M

ALMOST

ASLEE

HAVEN'T FELT LIKE
THIS FOR SO LONG.

I'M

ALMOST

ASLEE

HAVEN'T FELT LIKE
THIS FOR SO LONG.

I'M

ALMOST

ASLEE

HAVEN'T FELT LIKE
THIS FOR SO LONG.

I'M

ALMOST

ASLEE

AT LEAST HE'S NOT TOO FAR GONE TO REACT TO PAIN. THAT'S ENCOURAGING.

FULL RESTRAINTS, DOCTOR?

NO, NO. I DON'T THINK HE HAS THAT MUCH STRENGTH. HE'S JUST NOT TO GO "SLEEP-WALKING."

AT LEAST HE'S NOT TOO FAR GONE TO REACT TO PAIN. THAT'S ENCOURAGING.

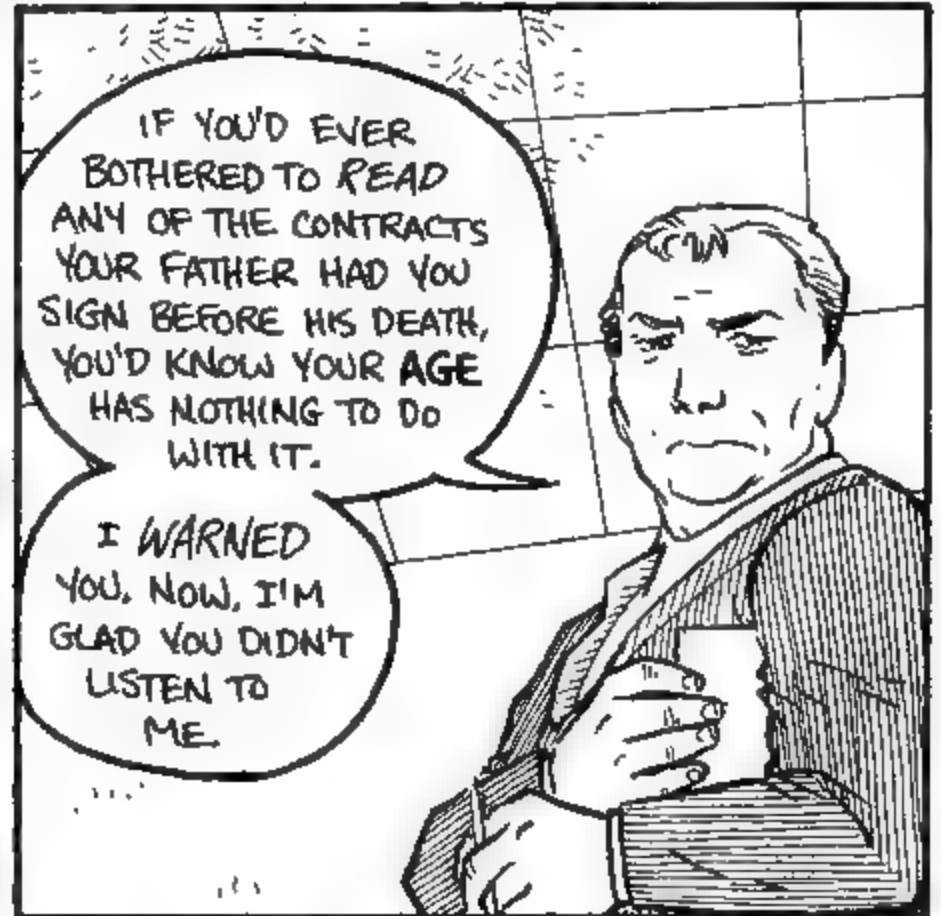
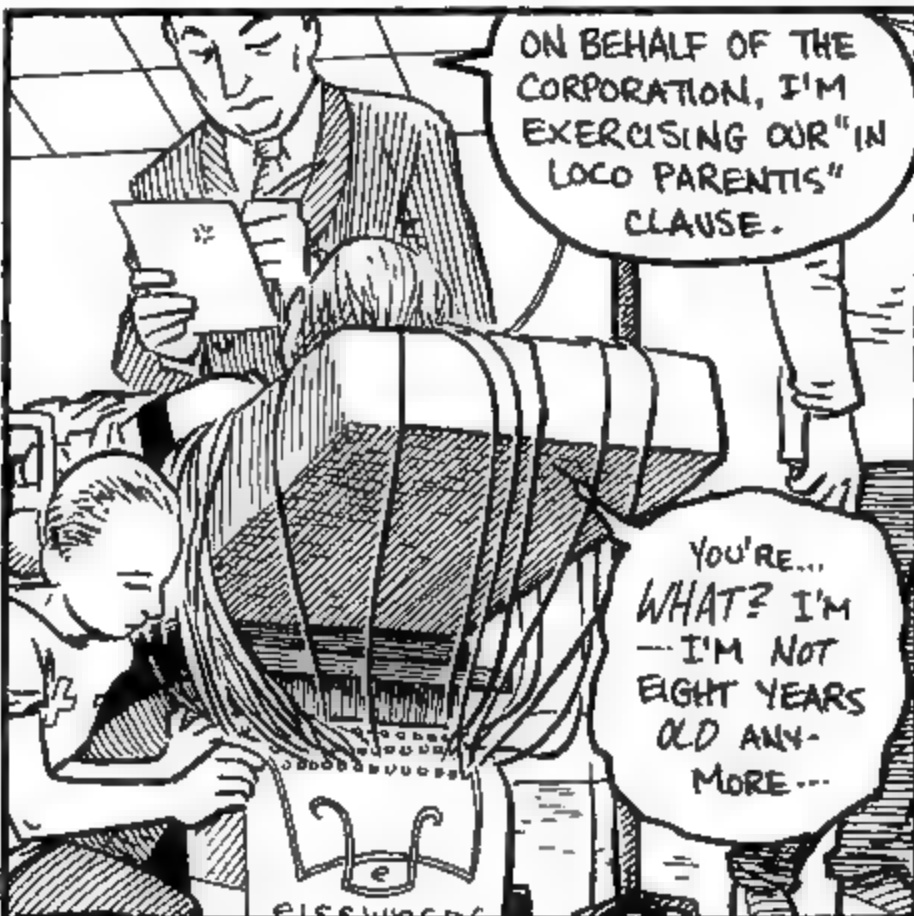
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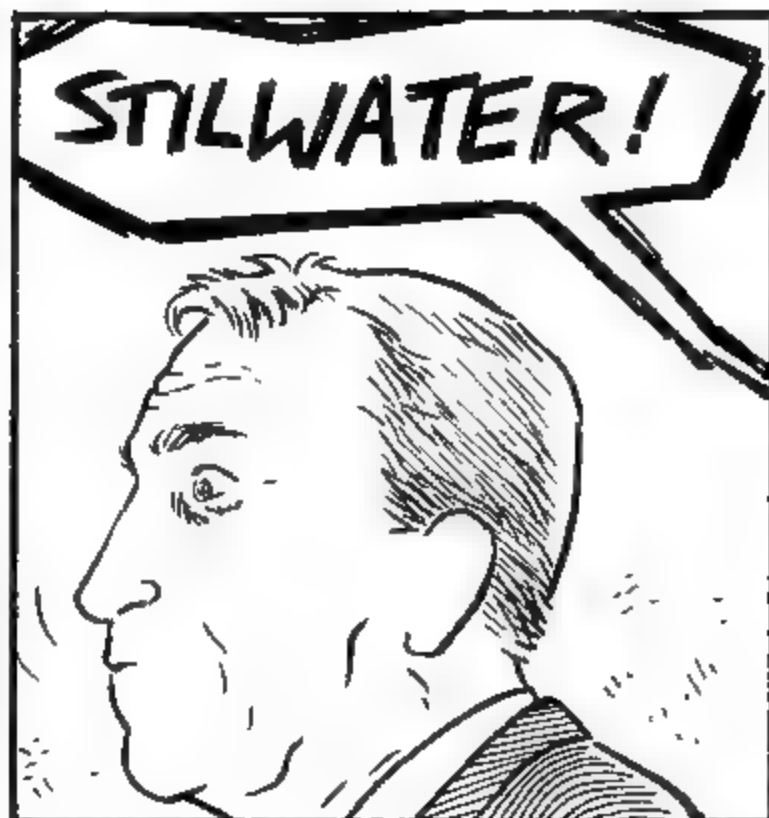
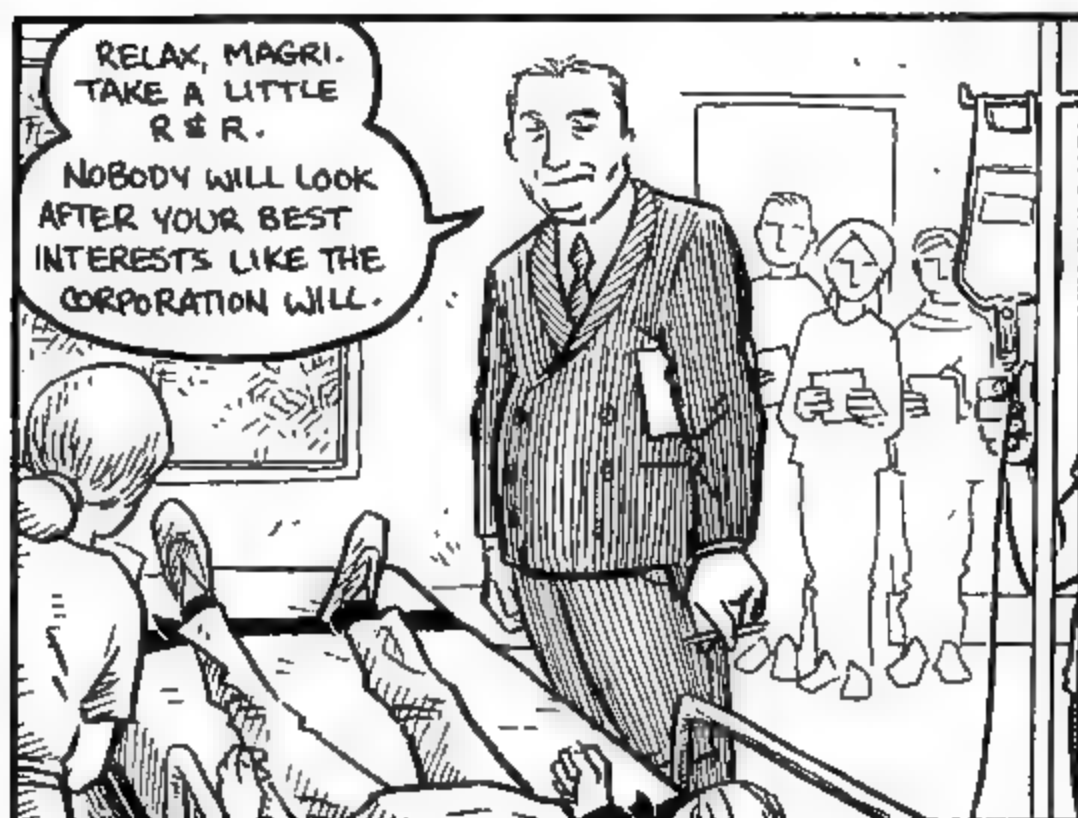
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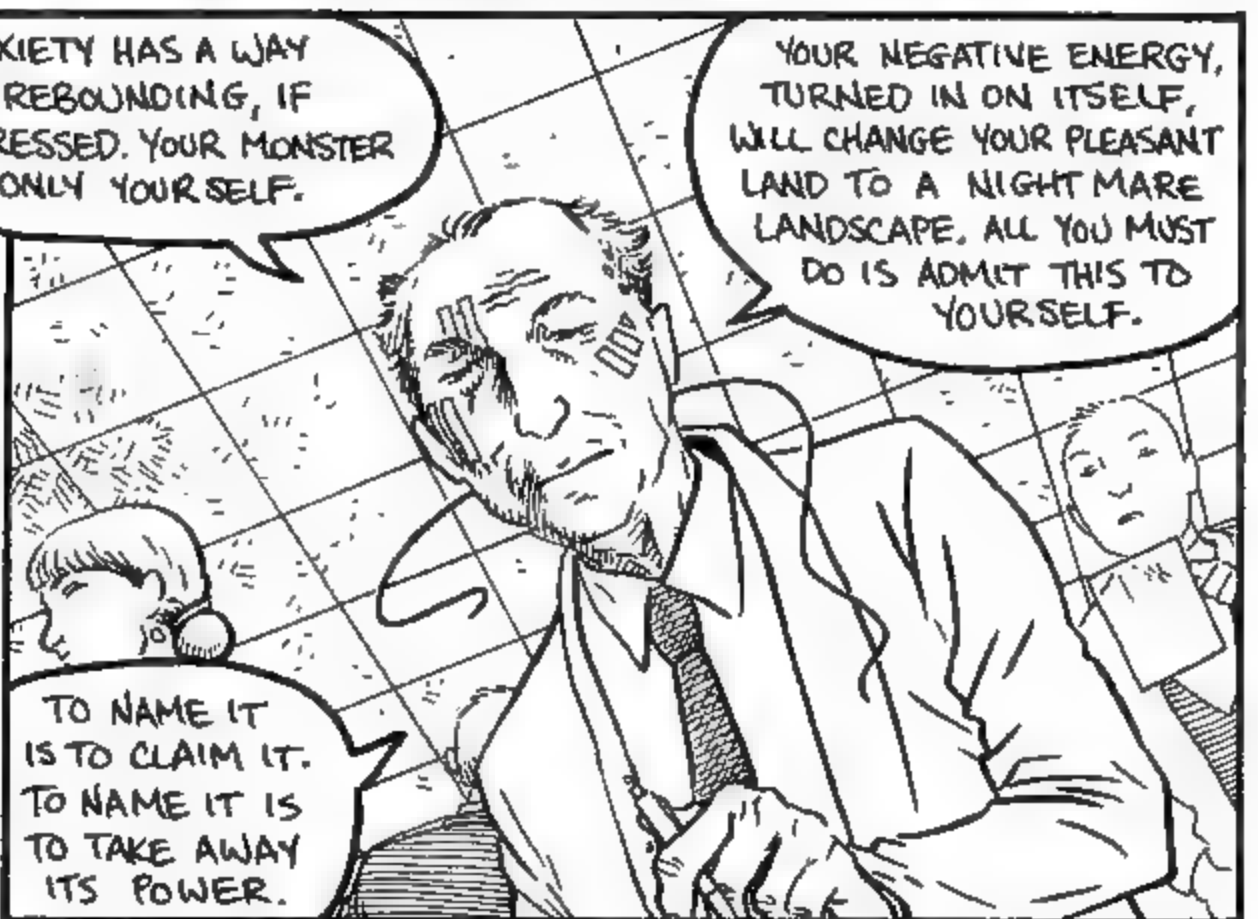
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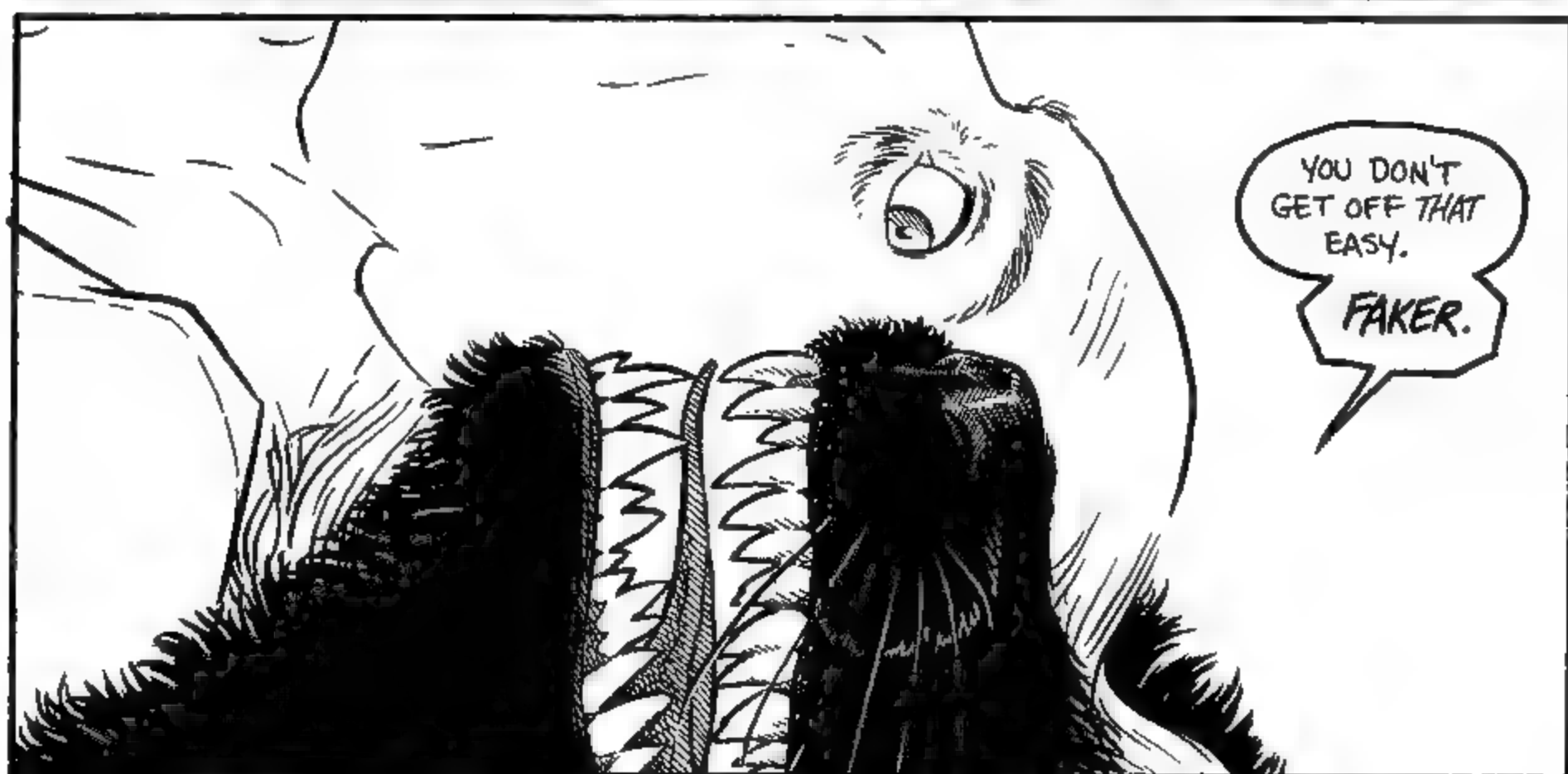
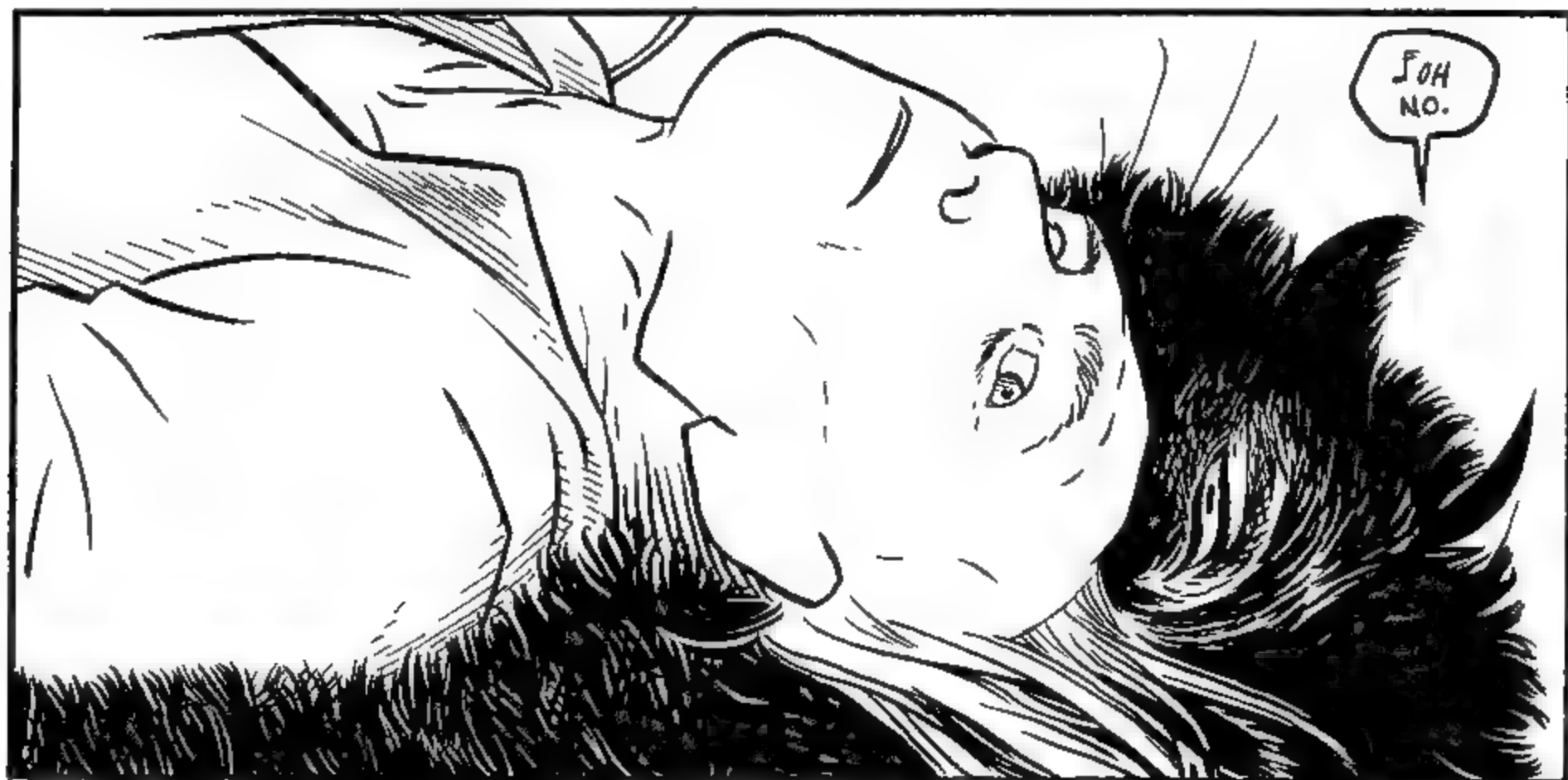
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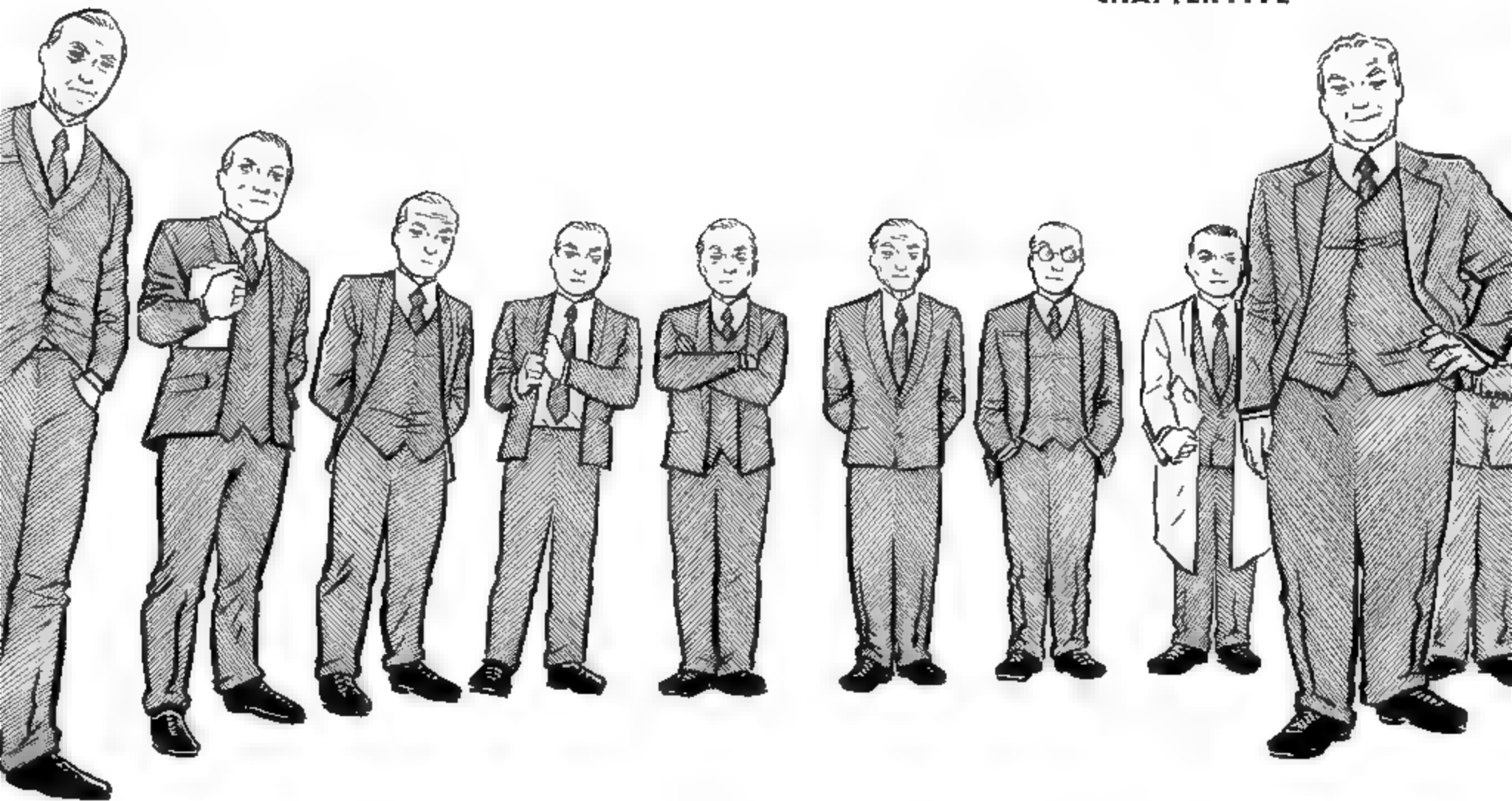


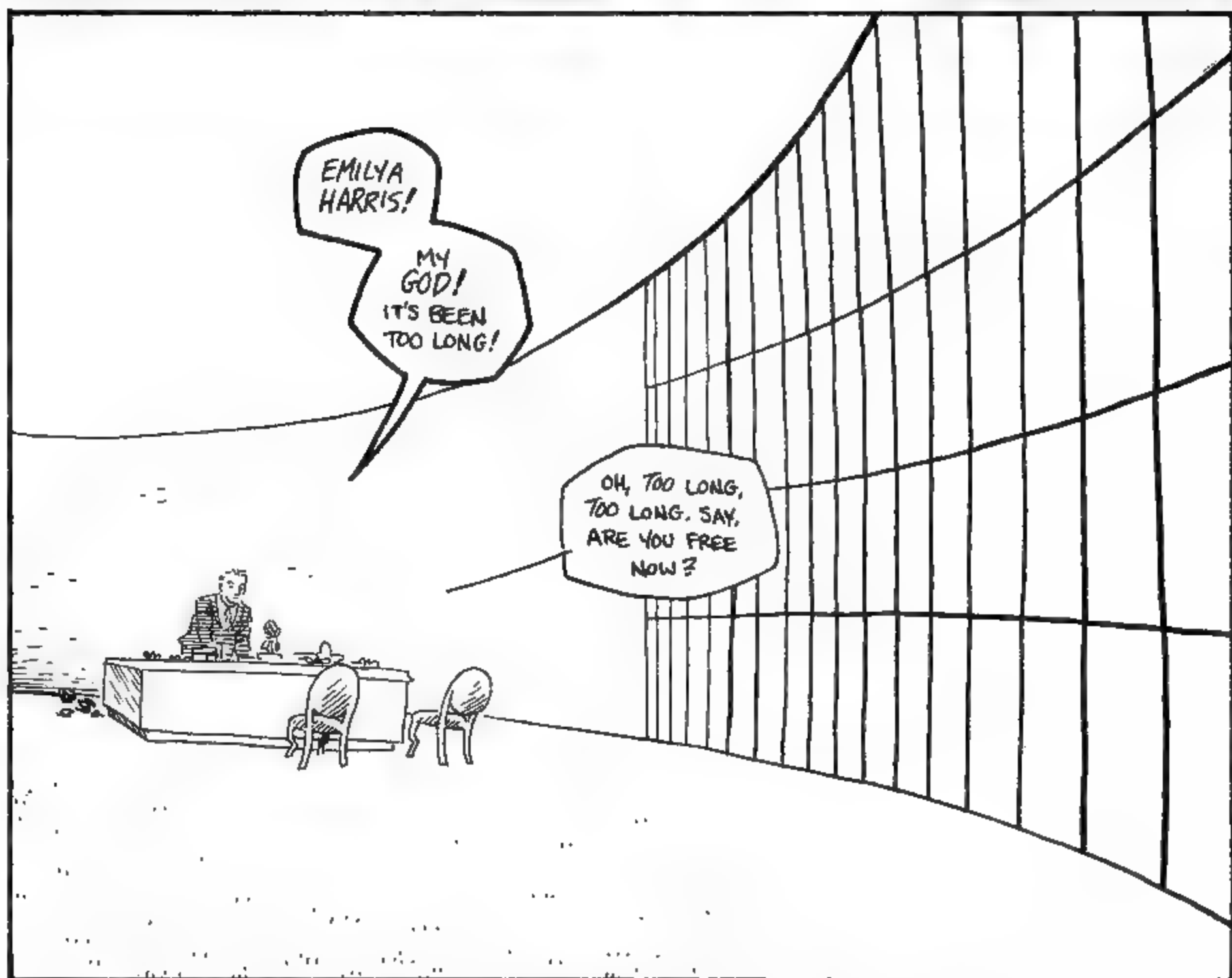




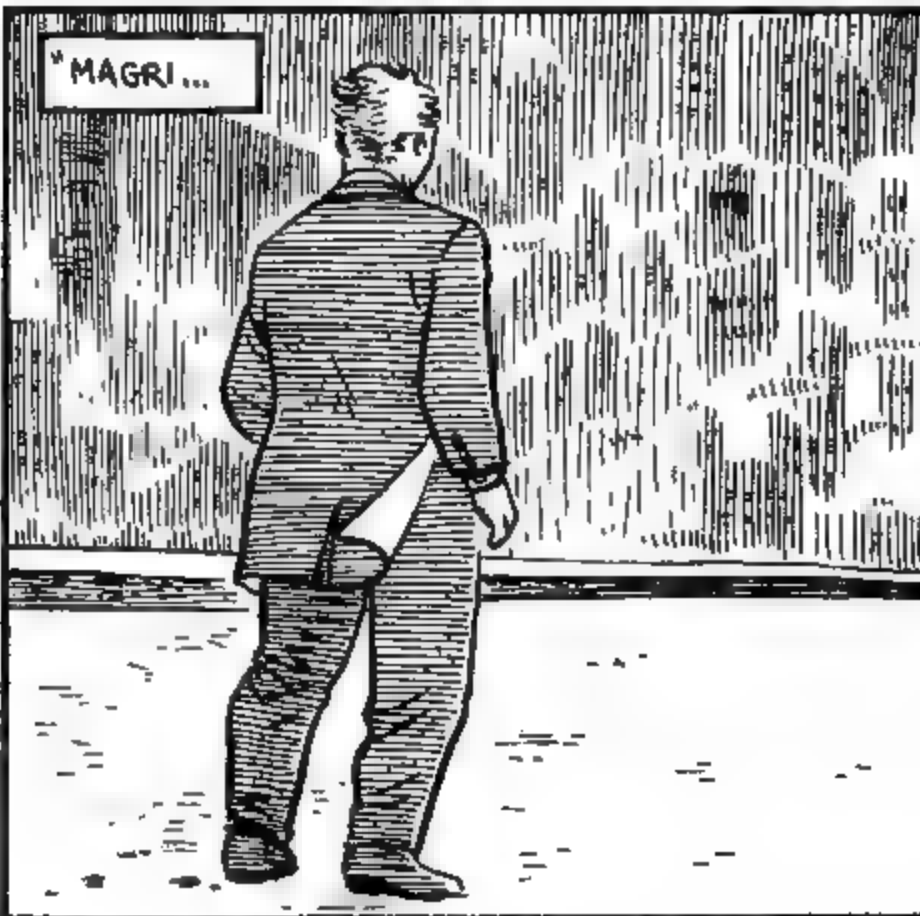
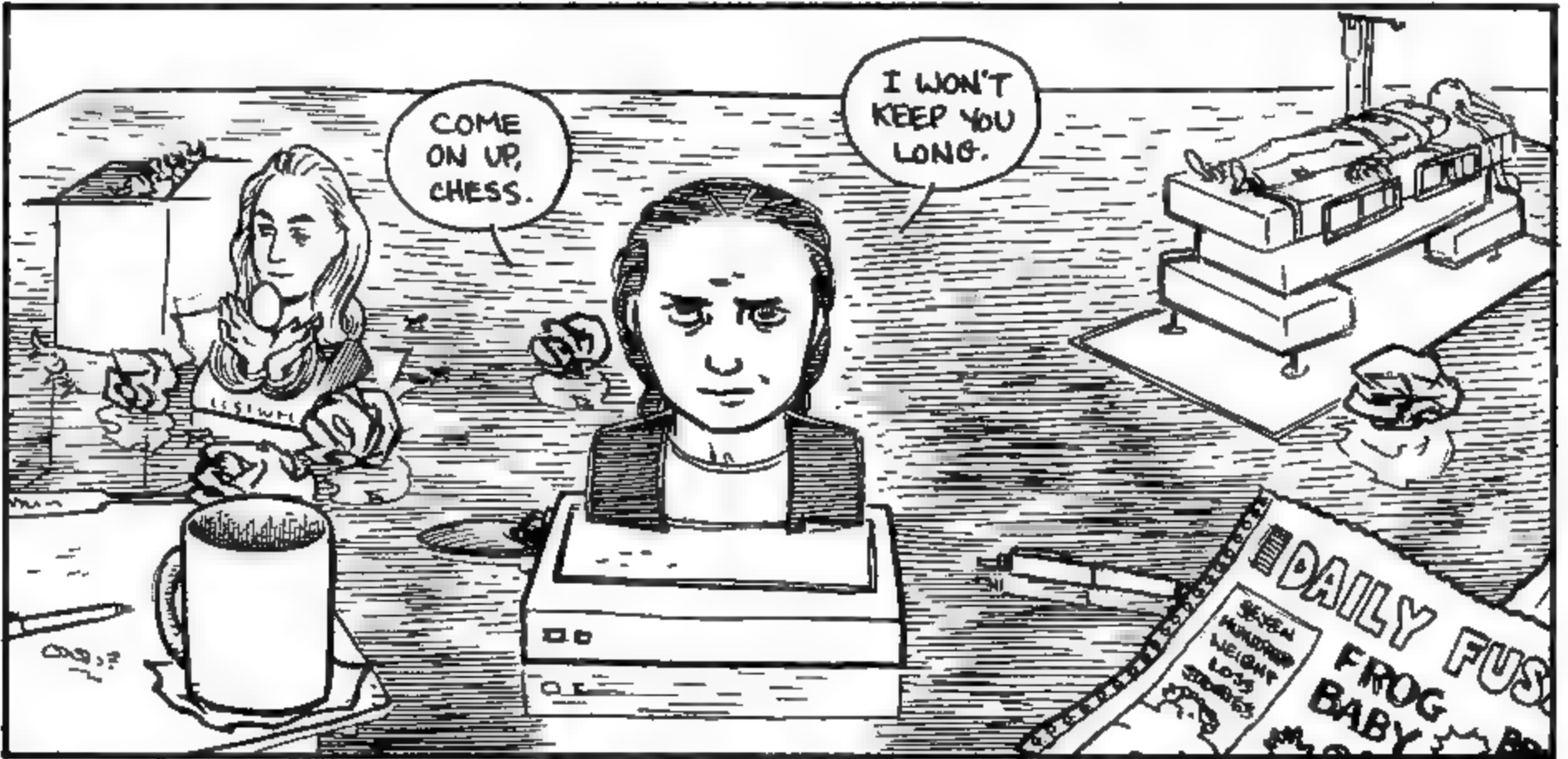
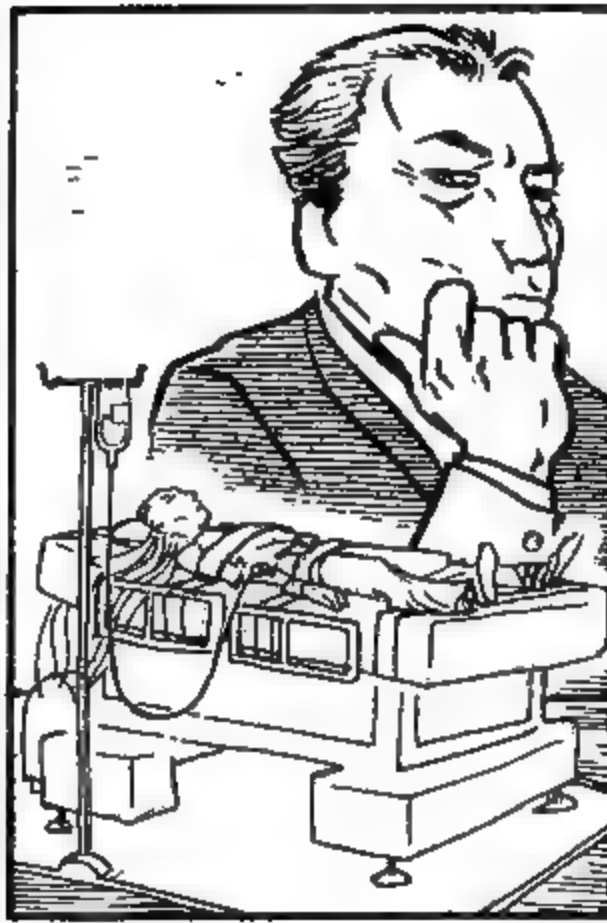


CHAPTER FIVE









"CHESS, THE ONLY REASON
THE HAMMER HASN'T COME
DOWN BEFORE NOW IS THAT
WE CAN'T DIAGNOSE THE
CAUSE..."

"--DEFINITELY HAVE THE VECTOR.
WHATEVER IS CAUSING ALL THIS
PHANTOM BRAIN DAMAGE IS
INSIDE YOUR VIRTUAL GETAWAY..."

"I TRUST YOU. I
KNOW YOU. WHY
SHOULD THE PEERS?"

"...VOUCHED FOR YOU
BUT THAT CAN ONLY
CARRY YOU SO FAR..."

"WAIT TOO LONG
AND IT WON'T
MATTER THAT WE
CAN'T PROVE IT..."

"...JUST IN
THE TABLOIDS
NOW, BUT--"

"PEOPLE WILL
PANIC, AND THAT
IS FAR MORE
DESTRUCTIVE
THAN SHUTTING
YOU DOWN..."

"UNDERSTAND, ALL
THIS SPINNING ENDS
IF IT IS DETERMINED
THAT THE CAUSE IS IN
YOUR SOFTWARE. THE
PUBLIC GOOD--"

"YOU'RE SAFE EXACTLY
AS LONG AS THE ECONOMIC
IMPACT OF SHUTTING
EVERYWHERE DOWN
OUTWEIGHS THE
LEGAL
FALLOUT"

WHEN I'M HOOKED
UP DIRECTLY, I CAN
HEAR EVERYTHING
IN THIS BUILDING.

A CACOPHANY
OF VOICES.

IT BRINGS
BACK
MEMORIES.

SOME PEOPLE
DO HEAR VOICES
IN THEIR HEADS.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG
I HEARD THEM
ALL THE TIME.

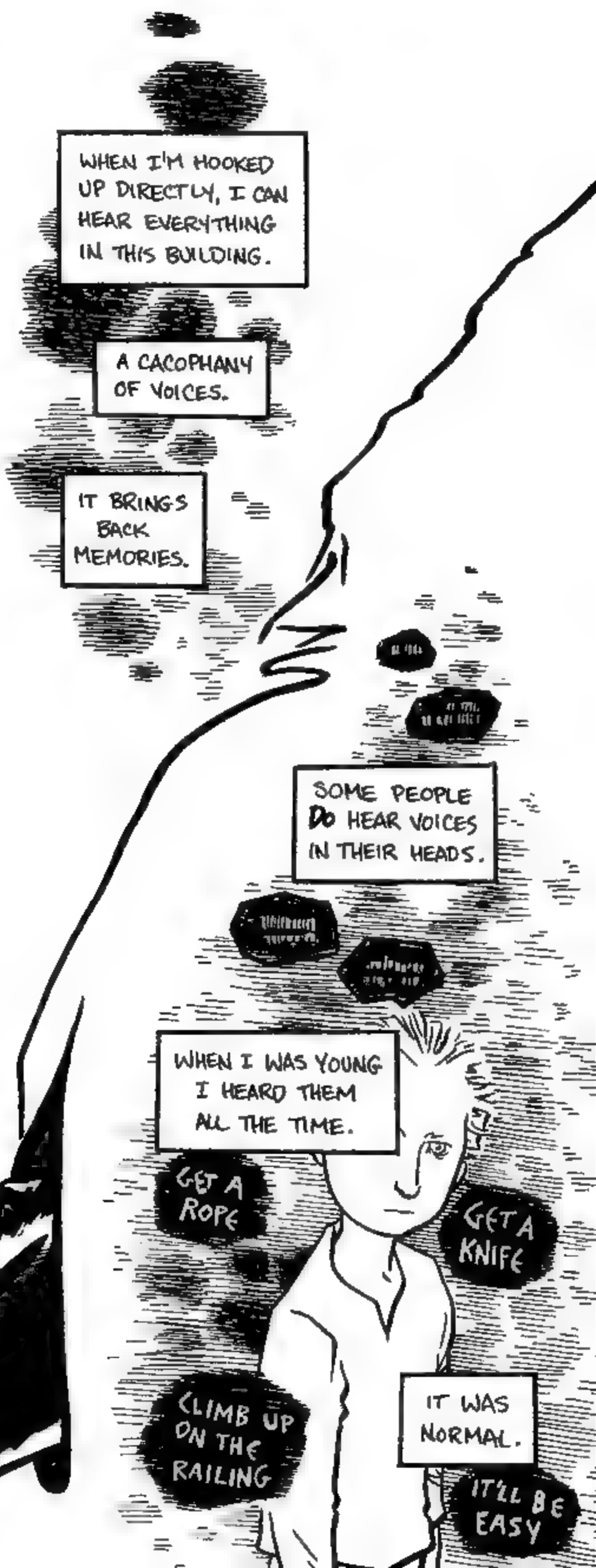
GET A
ROPE

GET A
KNIFE

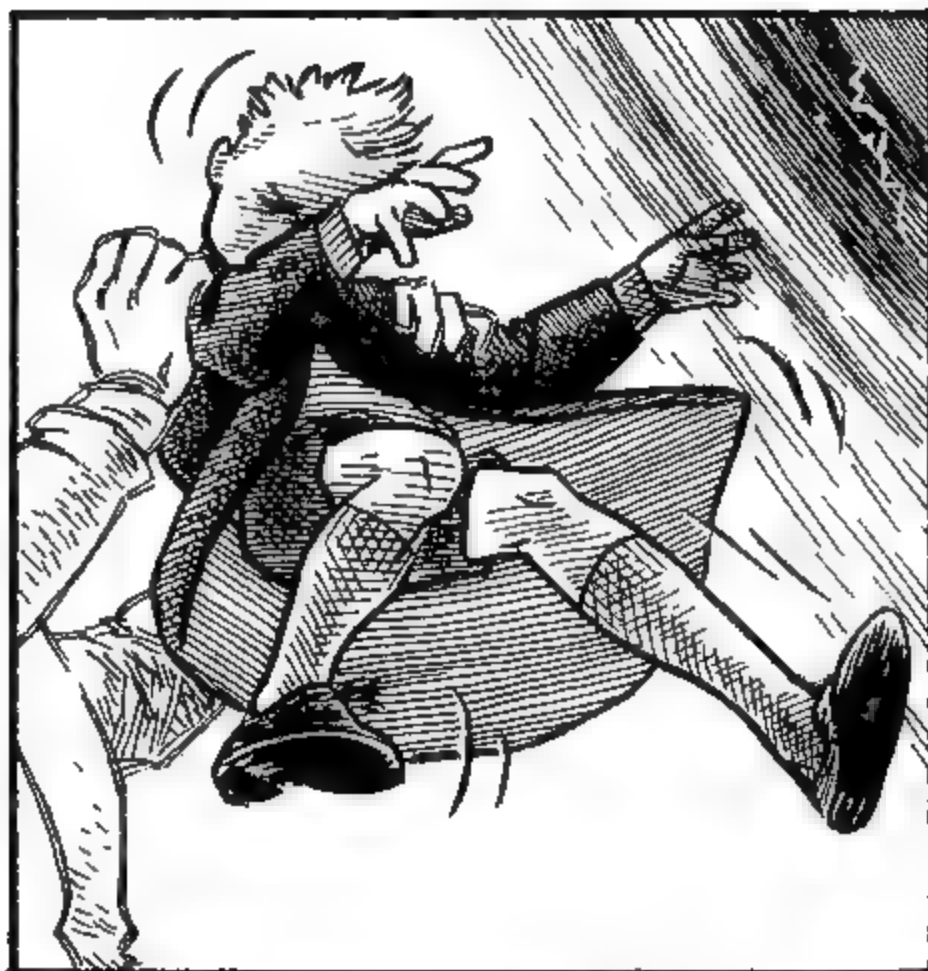
CLIMB UP
ON THE
RAILING

IT WAS
NORMAL.

IT'LL BE
EASY

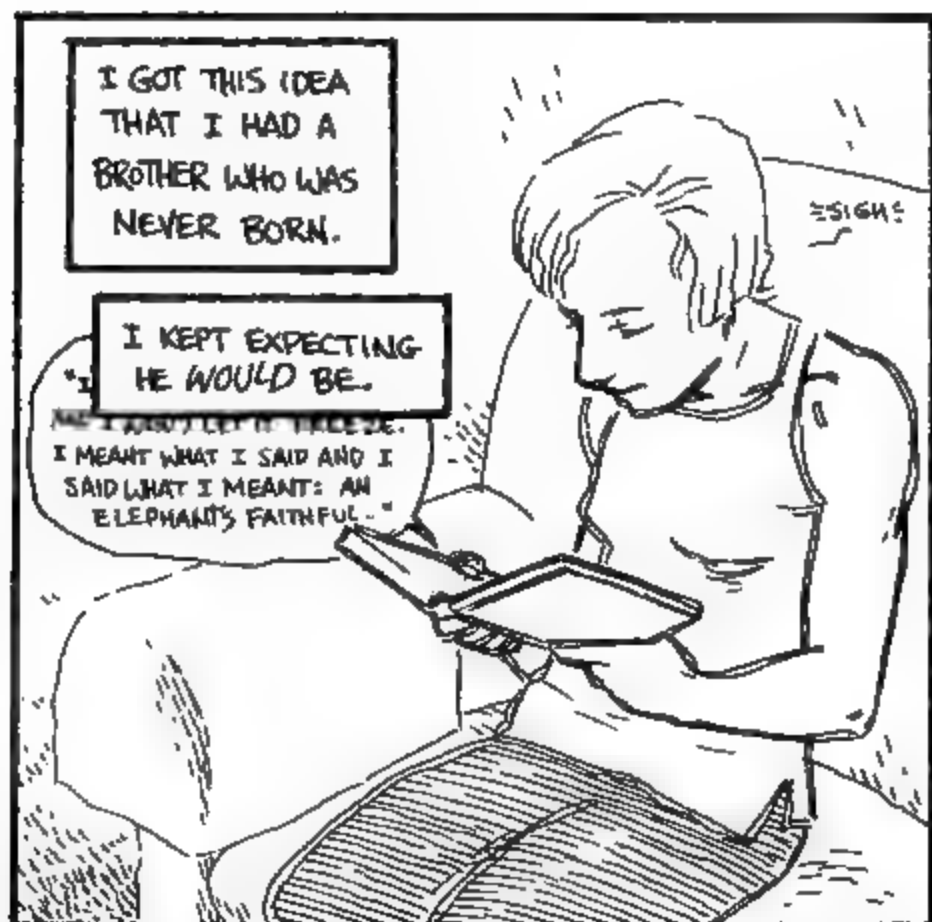








I HAD ONCE
OVERHEARD
MY MOTHER
SAYING SHE
HAD "LOST"
A BABY.



I GOT THIS IDEA
THAT I HAD A
BROTHER WHO WAS
NEVER BORN.

I KEPT EXPECTING
HE WOULD BE.

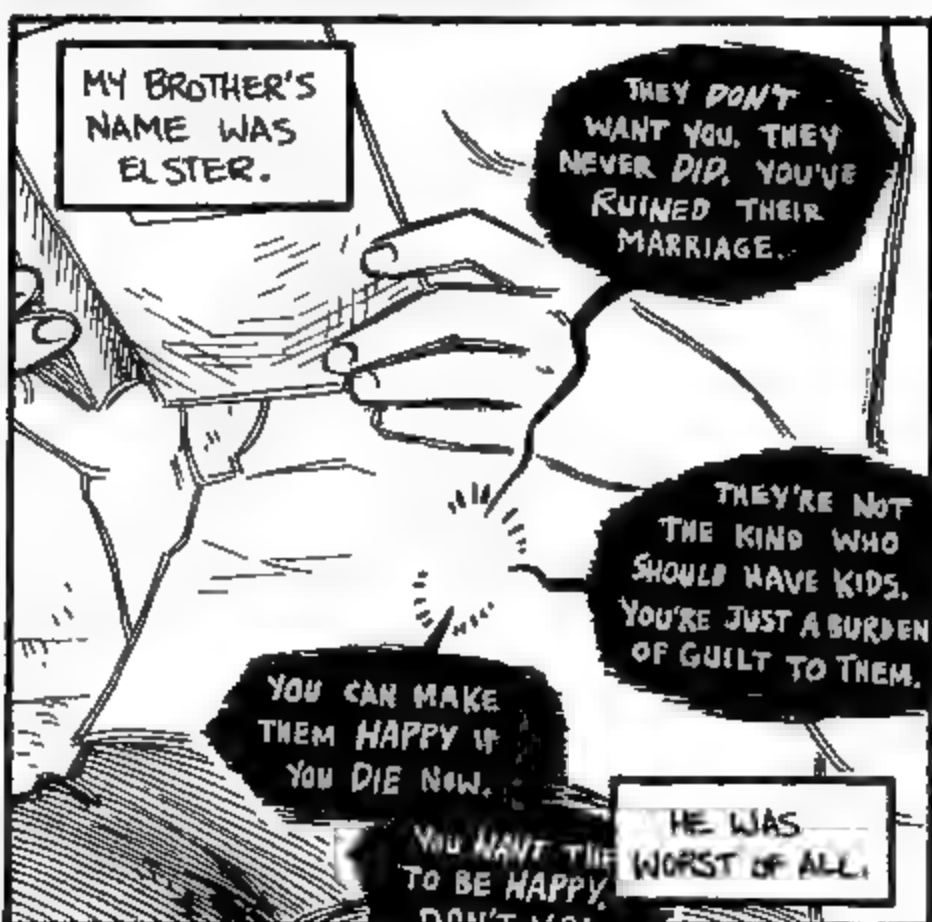
I MEANT WHAT I SAID AND I
SAID WHAT I MEANT: AN
ELEPHANT'S FAITHFUL.



HE TOLD ME SO
DAY AND NIGHT.

I'M
COMING.

YOU'D BETTER
BE GONE WHEN I
GET THERE OR I'LL
KILL YOU MYSELF.



MY BROTHER'S
NAME WAS
ELSTER.

THEY DON'T
WANT YOU, THEY
NEVER DID, YOU'VE
RUINED THEIR
MARRIAGE.

THEY'RE NOT
THE KIND WHO
SHOULD HAVE KIDS.
YOU'RE JUST A BURDEN
OF GUILT TO THEM.

YOU CAN MAKE
THEM HAPPY IF
YOU DIE NOW.

YOU WANT THEM
TO BE HAPPY,
DON'T YOU?

HE WAS
THE WORST OF ALL.

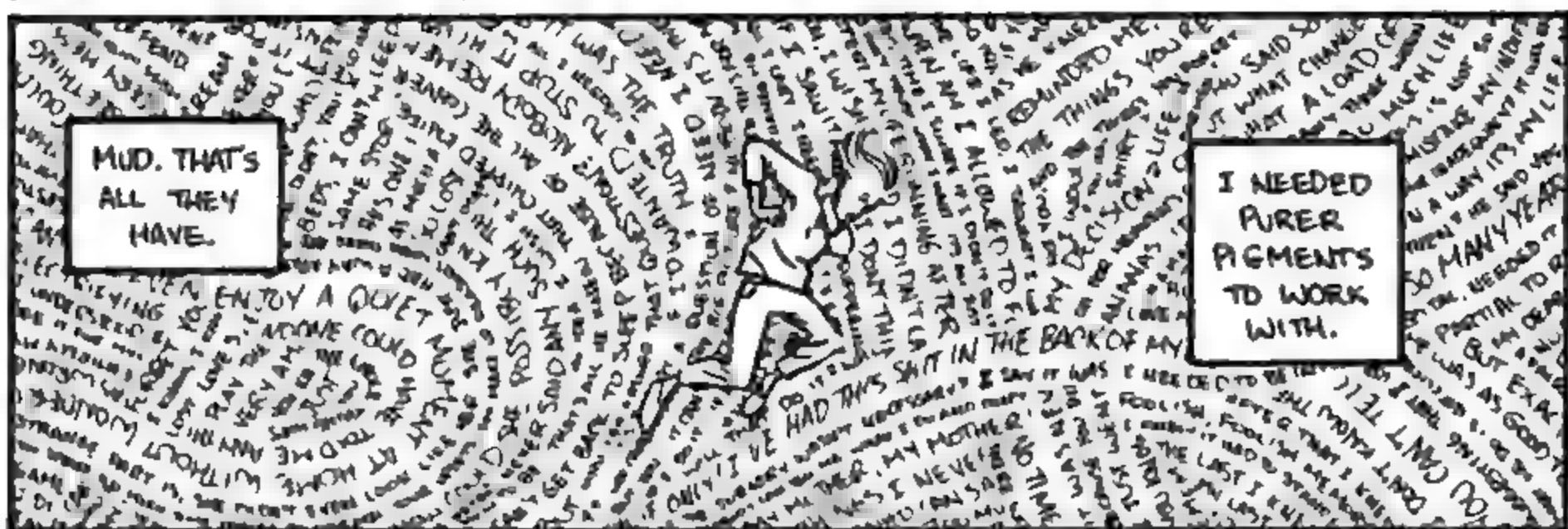
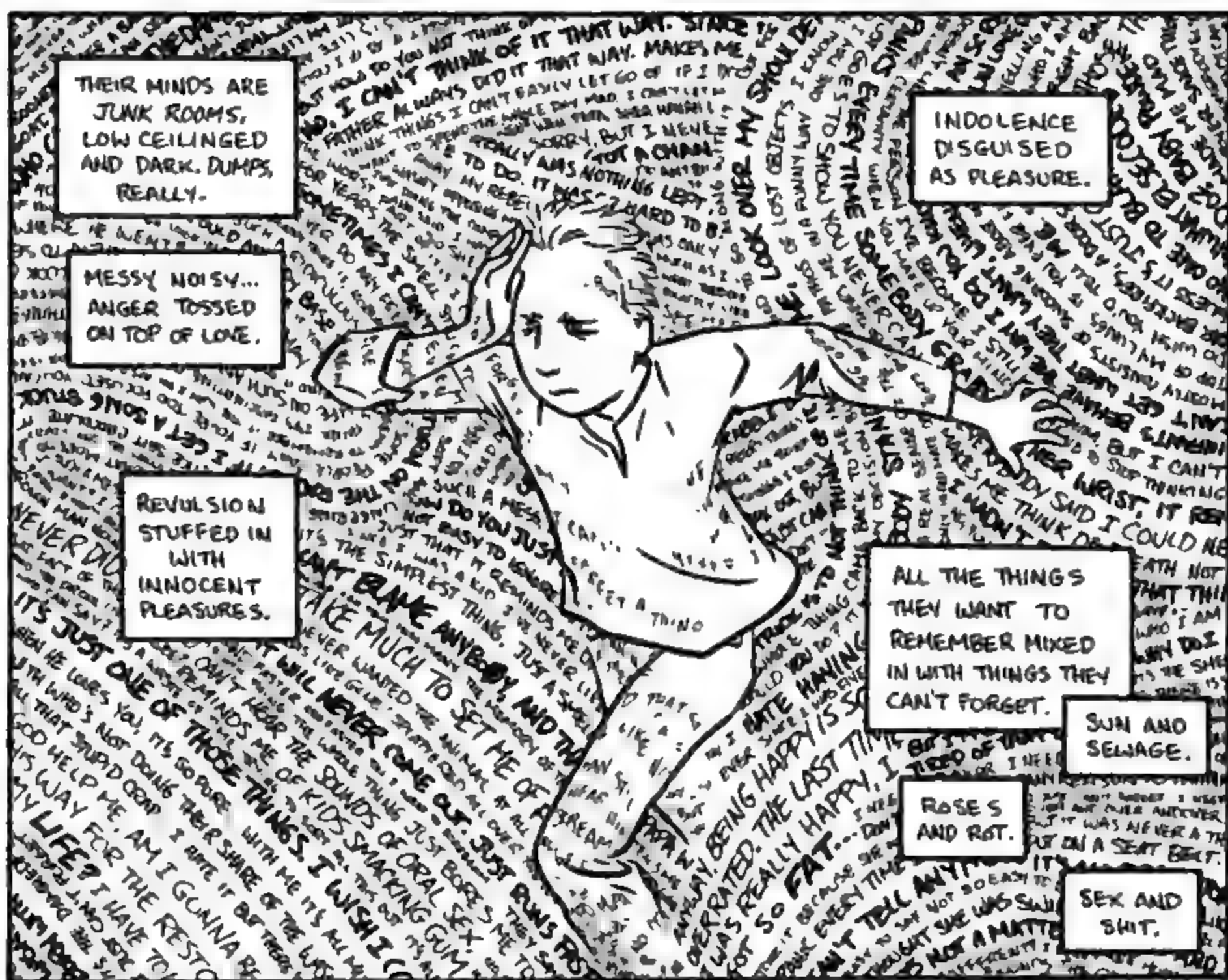
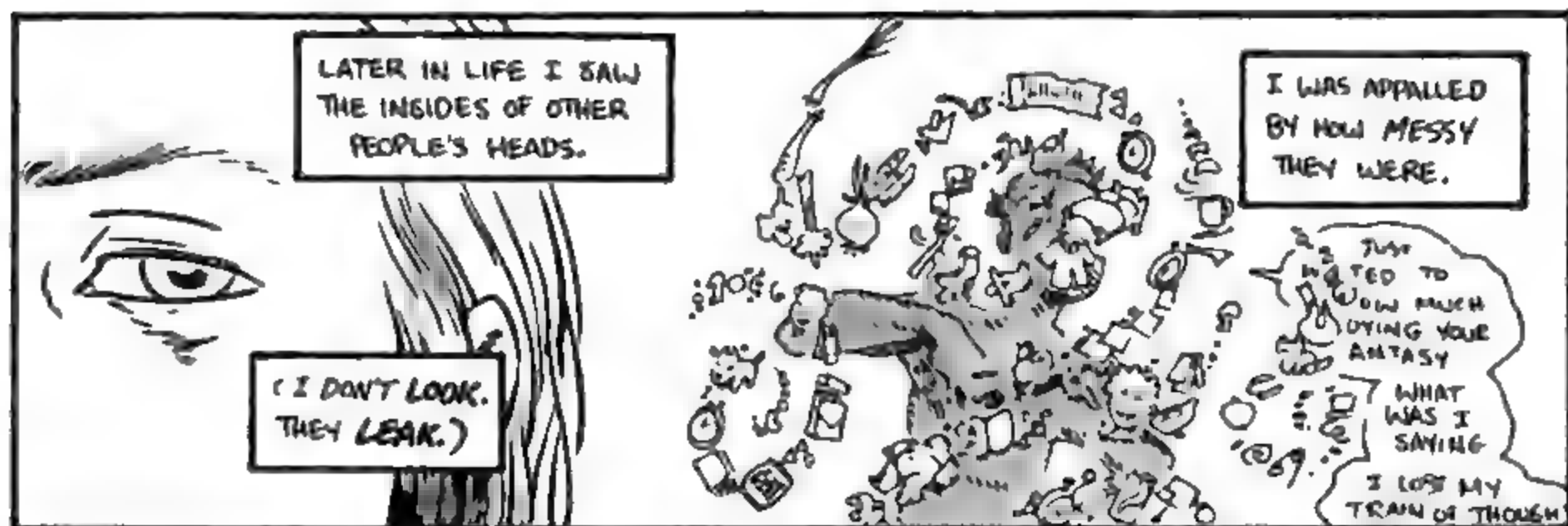
I DID WHAT I COULD TO
TURN DOWN THE VOLUME.

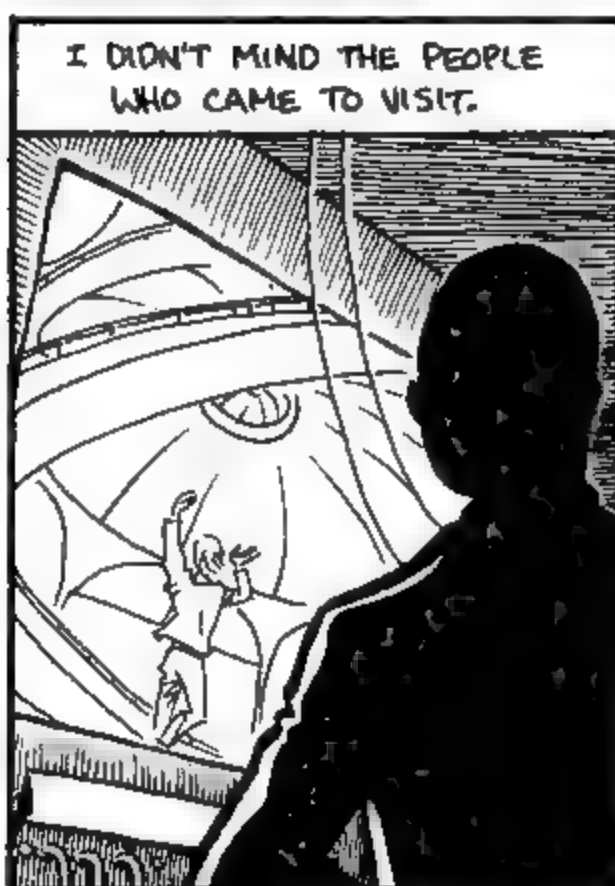
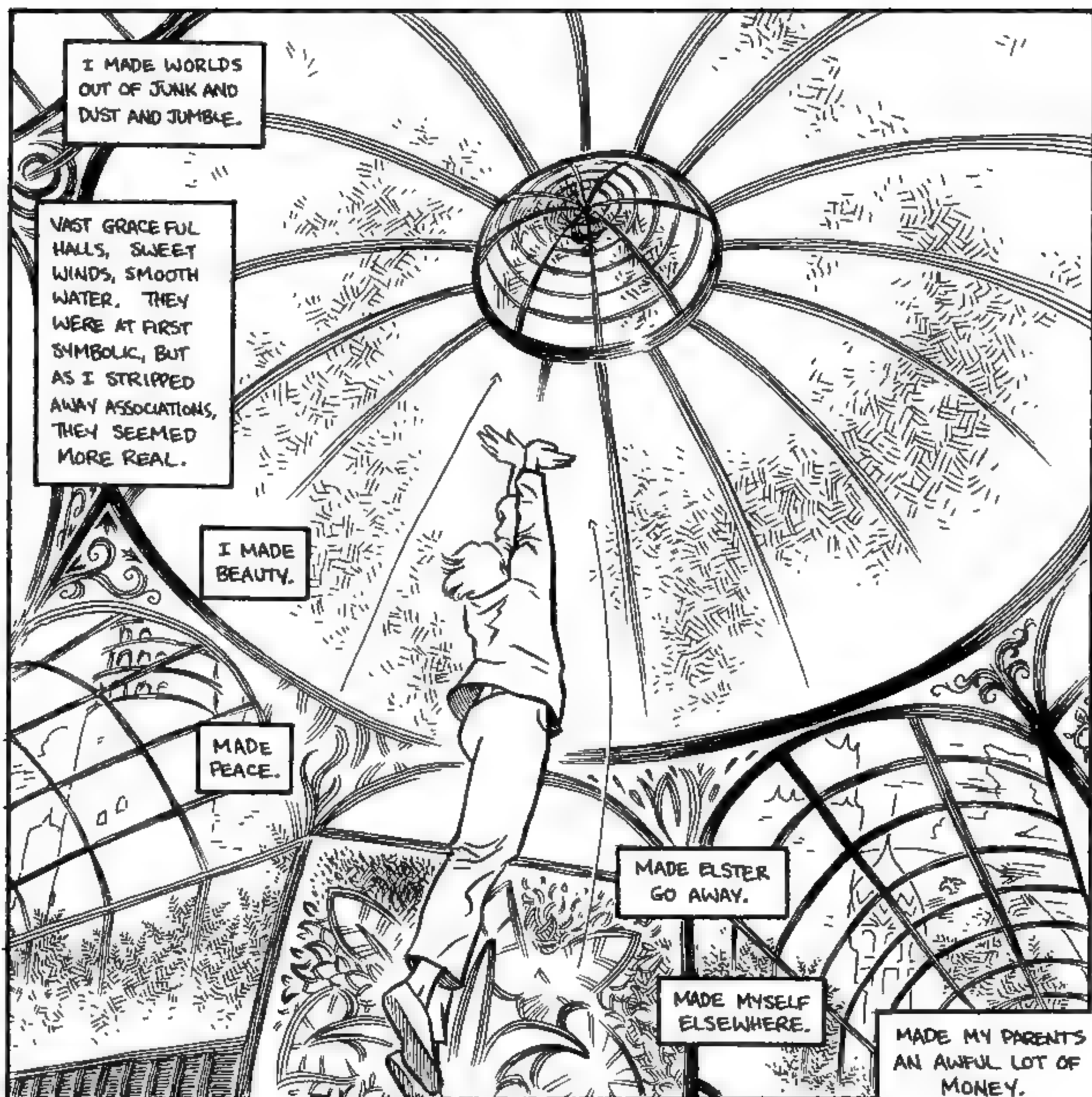
I COULD SEE WHOLE
MOUNTAIN RANGES IN
FLOWERPOT PEBBLES.

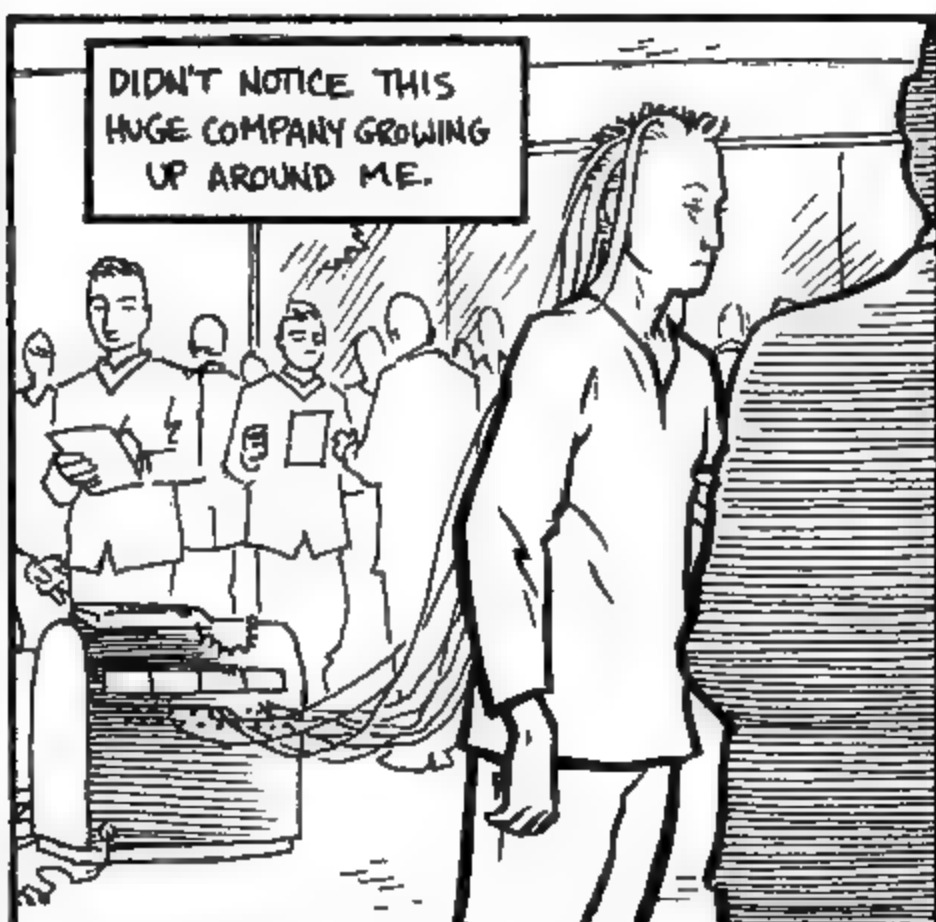
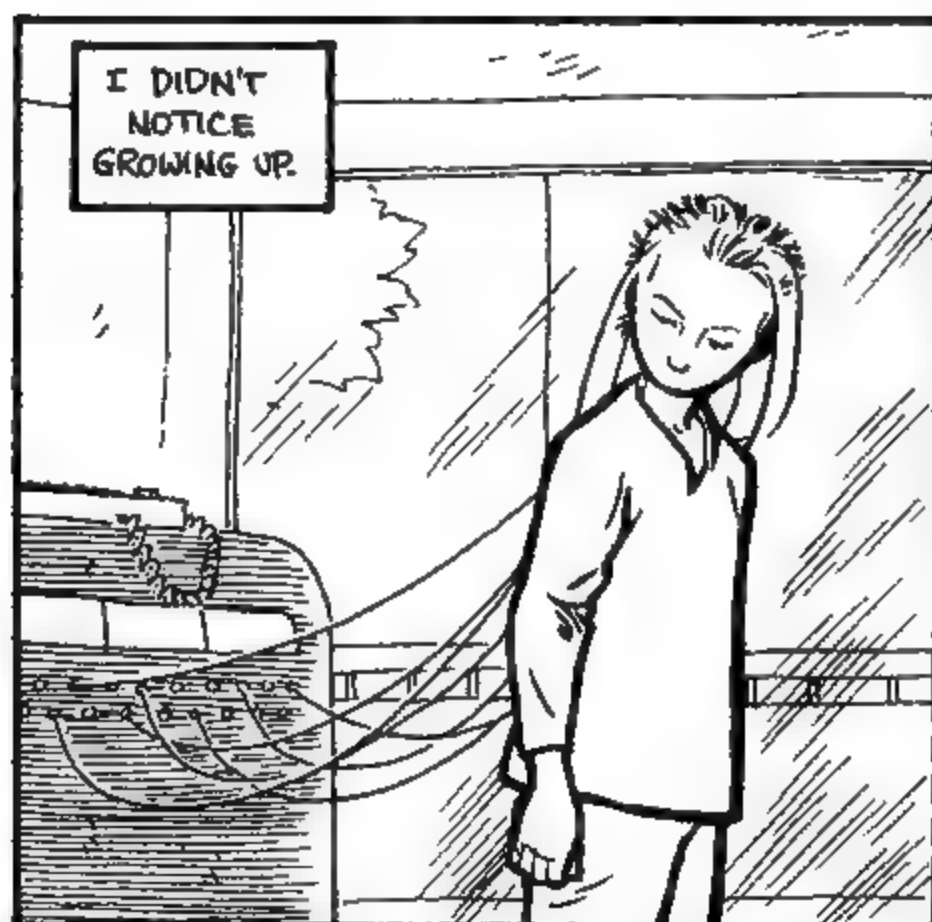
I NEVER MADE
UP PEOPLE I'D
PREFER TO BE.

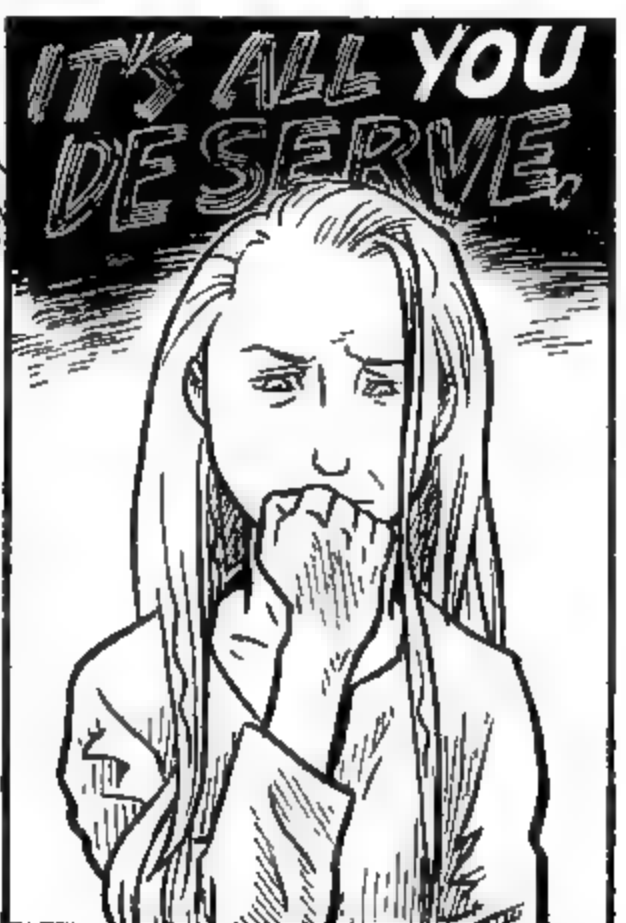
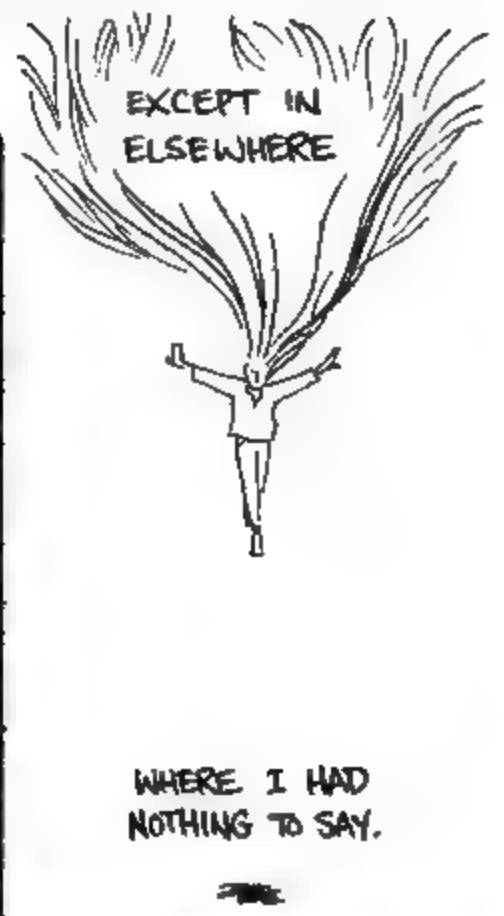
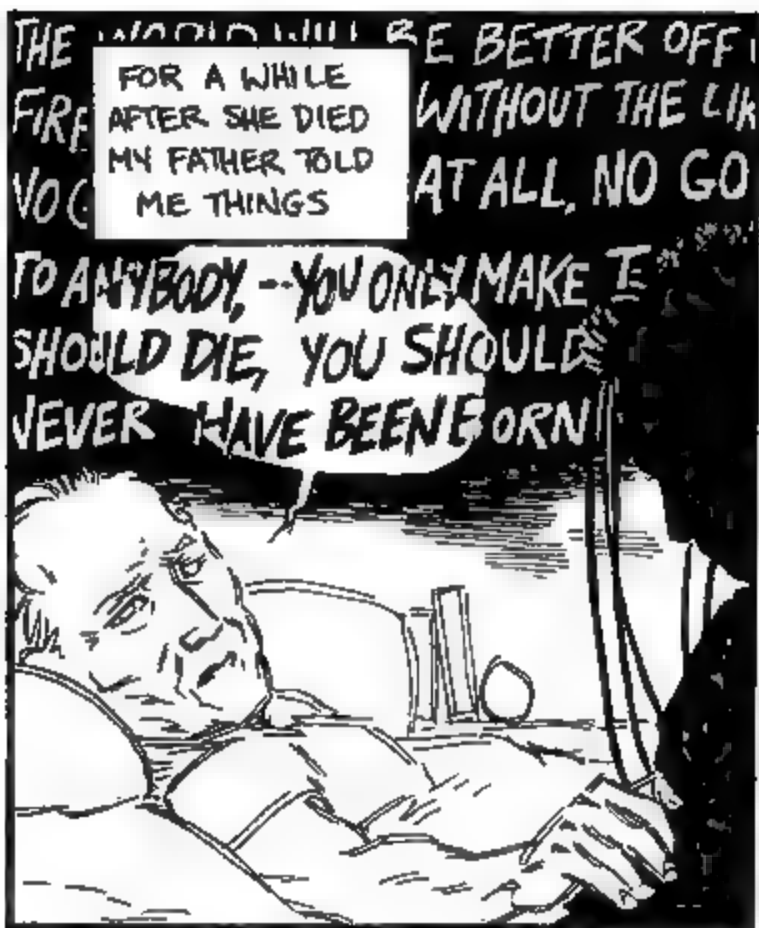
NEVER TRIED
TO REMAKE
OR REPLACE
MY PARENTS.

NEVER.









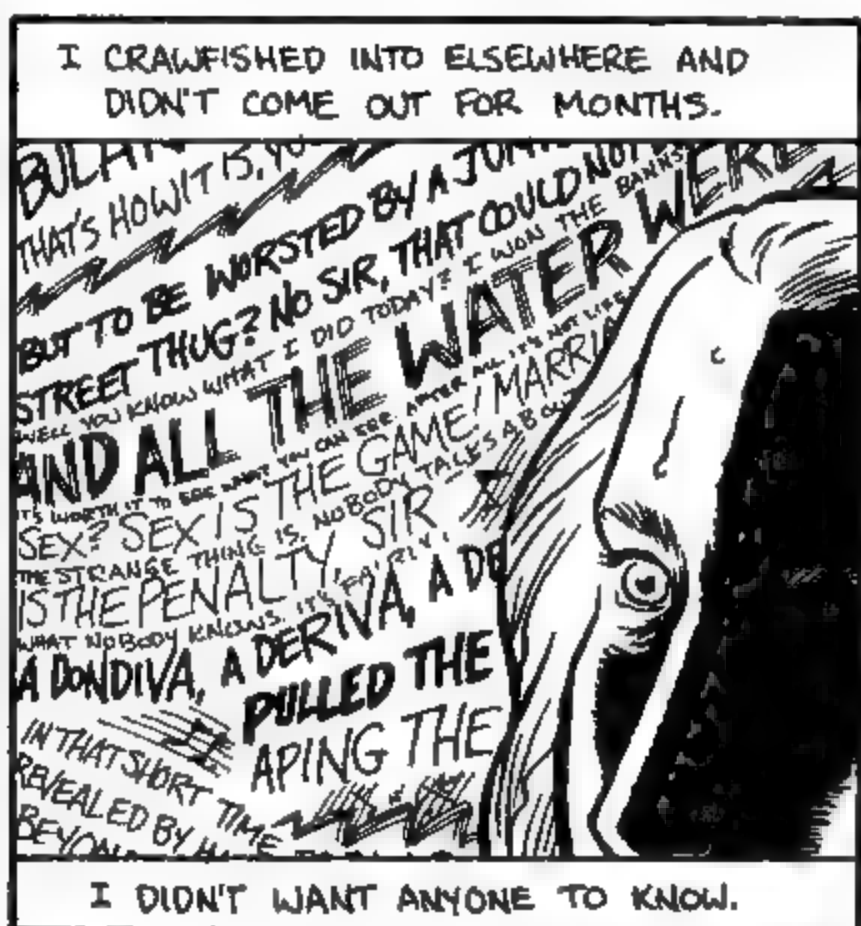
SOMETIME DURING THE FLURRY OF
FUNERAL, PACKING, PAPERWORK



THE VOICES



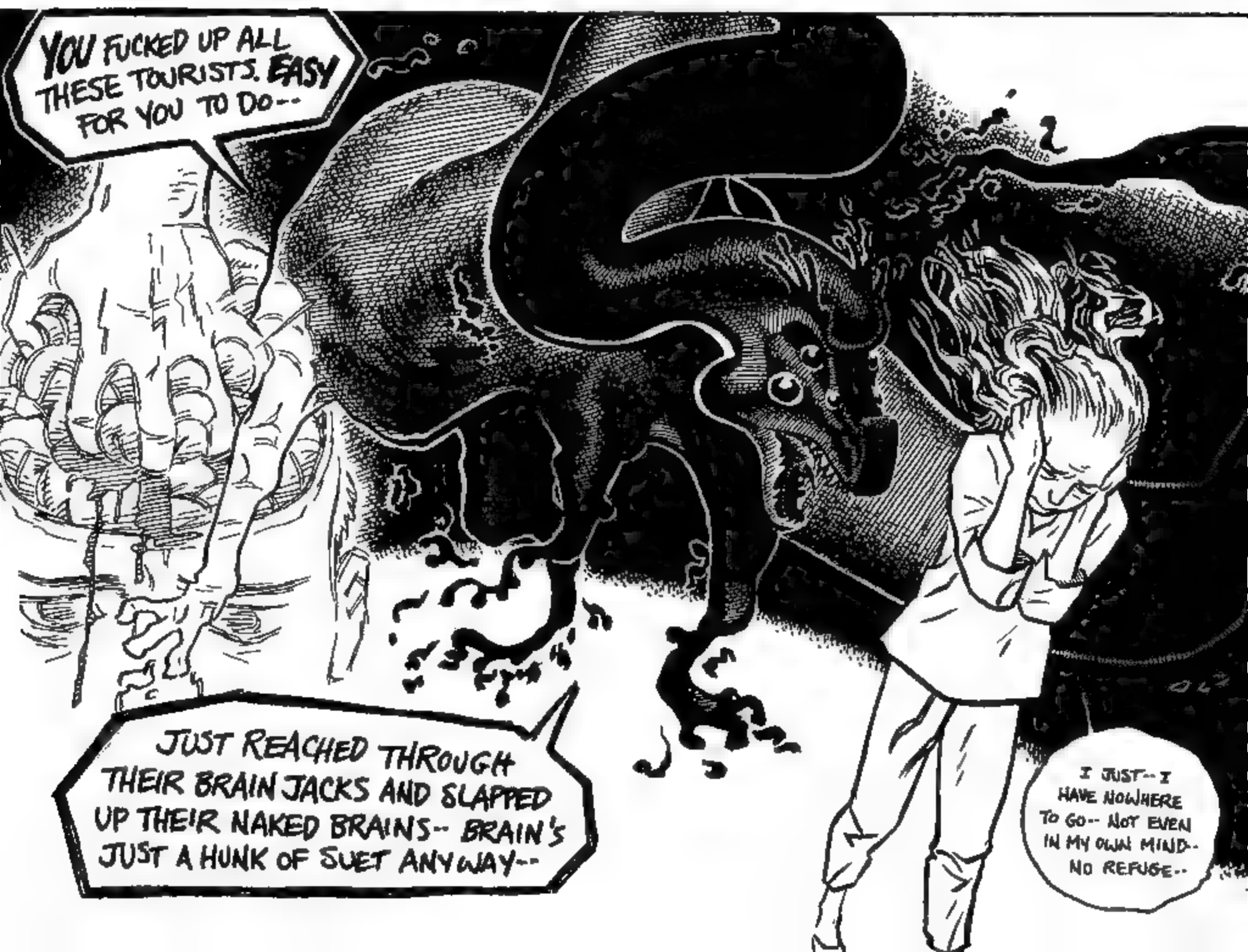
STOPPED.











**BRAIN
DAMAGE
?**

**EPILEPTIC FEEDBACK
LOOPS ARE THE PRICE
OF INTRUDING UPON
MAGRI KING
FUCK WHITE?**

**LOOK AT THESE
POOR SCARECROWS!
THEY BARELY KNOW
WHAT HIT 'EM!**

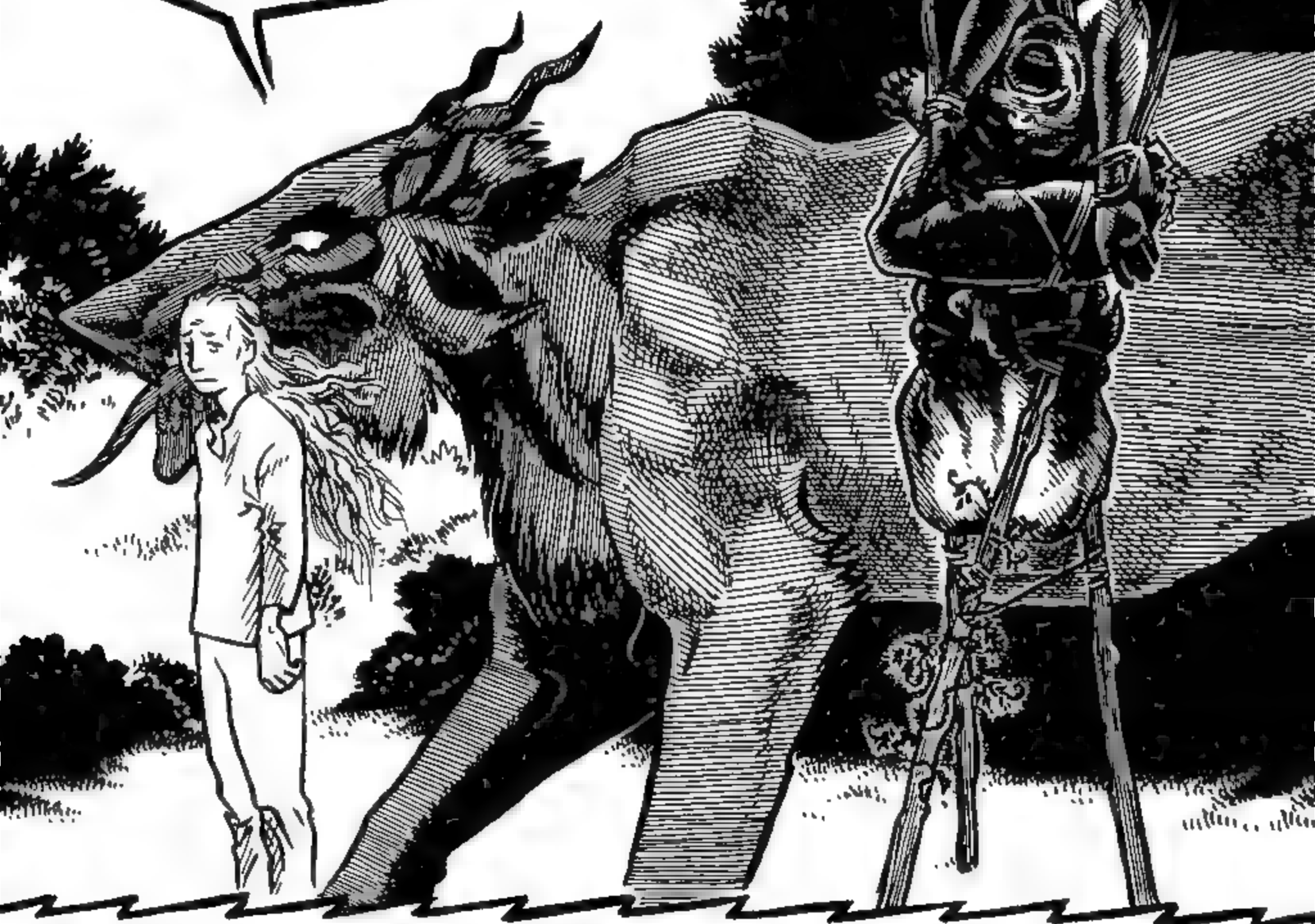
**THIS ONE SMELLS
TUNA OIL TWELVE
HOURS A DAY!**

**THIS ONE CAN NO
LONGER RECOGNIZE
PEOPLE BY THEIR
VOICES!**

**THAT ONE CAN'T
SEE THE COLOR RED
WITHOUT SNEEZING!**

**AND
THAT
ONE-?**

SHIT-- SHE CAN'T TALK AT ALL, BECAUSE WHEN SHE TRIES TO OPEN HER MOUTH HER TOES FLEX! SHE TRIES TO PEE--WAX LEAKS OUT HER EARS! SHE'S GONNA HAVE HER BABY IN TWO MONTHS. WON'T THAT BE FUN!



BUT YA KNOW, THEY'RE ALL **HAPPY**, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THIS PLACE SOPPED FULL OF **ENDORPHINS**, SO THEY KEEP COMING **BACK!** BECAUSE YOU'RE TOO BIG A FUCKIN' COWARD TO LET ANYBODY GO AWAY **MAD!**

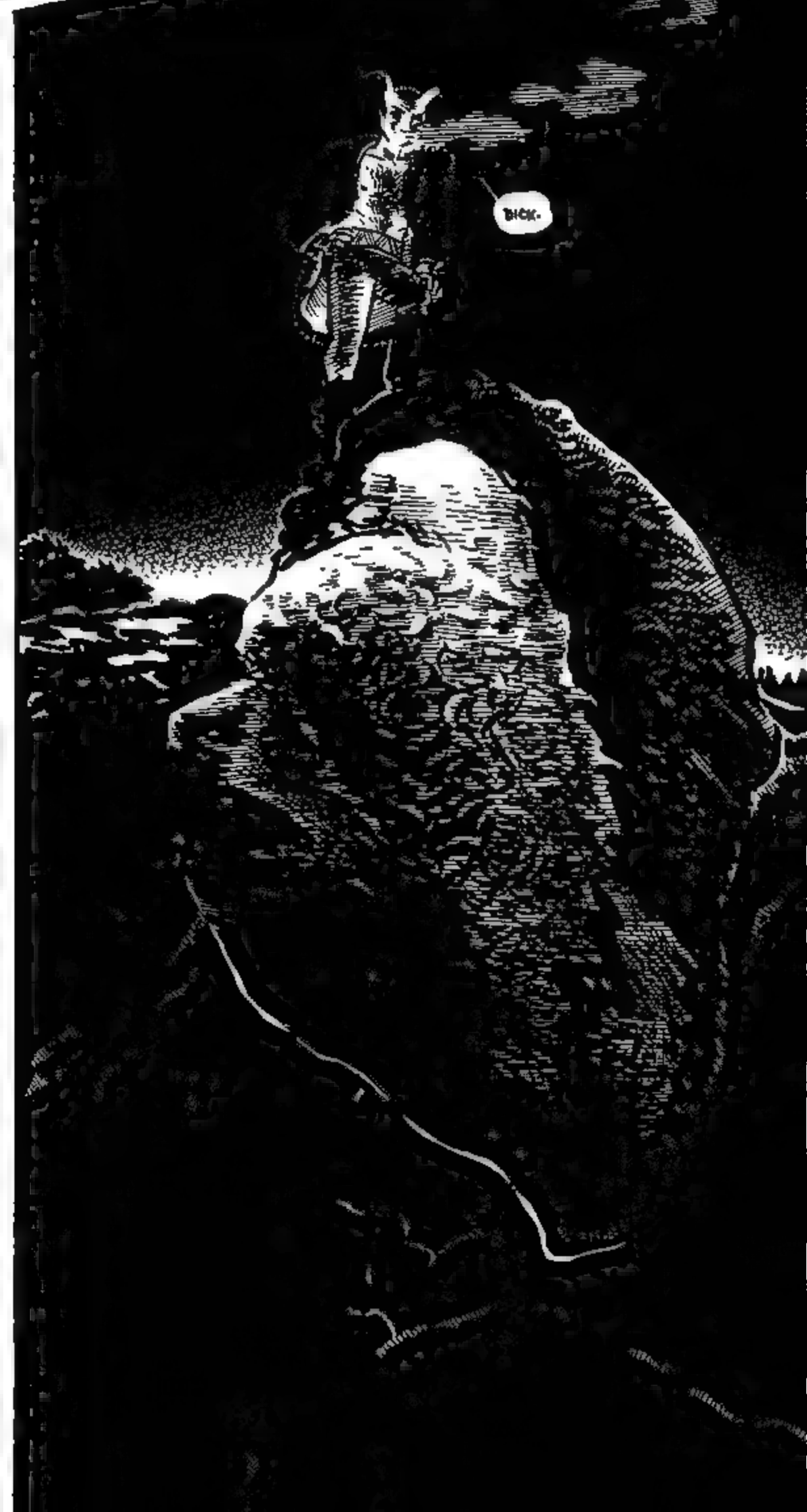


AND **THAT** AIN'T EVEN THE **WORST** OF IT! THE **REAL** REASON YOU DID ALL THIS SHIT AND WILL **KEEP ON** DOING IT--





DON'T
THINK
I'LL HAVE
TO.



CHAPTER SIX



CSM2002
NOT HALF
AS COOL
AS
HERB
RITTS



LOST IN STATIC

MY FEW REMAINING WIRELESS IMPLANTS ARE DESPERATELY TRYING TO CATCH ANY AVAILABLE SIGNAL

THEY'RE PICKING UP A LOT OF NOISE FROM THE BUILDING

THIS IS FATIGUE-RELATED STUPOR, SIR... YES, TECHNICALLY IT'S A COMA, BUT...

EVERY ROOM IS MIKED AND CAMERAED.

THERE WERE STILL VISITORS JACKED INTO ELSEWHERE WHEN HE WENT DOWN, SIR.

COMPLETE BREAKDOWN.

THIS TIME WE'VE GOT TO TAKE STEPS

[illegible]

LOST IN STATIC

MY FEW REMAINING WIRELESS IMPLANTS ARE DESPERATELY TRYING TO CATCH ANY AVAILABLE SIGNAL

THEY'RE PICKING UP A LOT OF NOISE FROM THE BUILDING

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THERE WERE STILL VISITORS JACKED INTO ELSEWHERE WHEN HE WENT DOWN, SIR.

COMPLETE BREAKDOWN.

THIS TIME WE'VE GOT TO TAKE STEPS TO TAKE THEM

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THIS IS FATIGUE-RELATED STUPOR, SIR... YES, TECHNICALLY IT'S A COMA, BUT...

EVERY ROOM IS MIKED AND CAMERAED.

THERE WERE STILL VISITORS JACKED INTO ELSEWHERE WHEN HE WENT DOWN, SIR.

COMPLETE BREAKDOWN.

THIS TIME WE'VE GOT TO TAKE STEPS TO TAKE THEM AWAY FROM THEIR HEADS- THE CAPTAINS ARE BASICALLY ALWAYS TRYING TO DISTRACT HIM WITH HIS HAIR, PAUL KIDNAPING HIMSELF.

LOST IN STATIC

MY FEW REMAINING WIRELESS IMPLANTS ARE DESPERATELY TRYING TO CATCH ANY AVAILABLE SIGNAL

THEY'RE PICKING UP A LOT OF NOISE FROM THE BUILDING

THIS IS FATIGUE-RELATED STUPOR, SIR... YES, TECHNICALLY IT'S A COMA, BUT...

EVERY ROOM IS MIKED AND CAMERAED.

THERE WERE STILL VISITORS JACKED INTO ELSEWHERE WHEN HE WENT DOWN, SIR.

COMPLETE BREAKDOWN.

THIS TIME WE'VE GOT TO TAKE STEPS



THE
FURTHER
I FALL

"IF YOU'RE NOBODY,
YOU CAN'T BE SOMEBODY
UNLESS YOU'RE SOME-
BODY ELSE."

IF I COULD
JUST USE UP
SOME OF

I CAN'T WRITE.
I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING
ABOUT PEOPLE. BUILDING
A WORLD ISN'T WRITING

WHAT WOULD I WRITE
ABOUT BESIDES BEING
A BIT F*CK CRAZY?
I JUST CAN'T

THE MORE
THIS MESS
SEEMS TO BE
SAYING
SOMETHING

"LET ME
TELL YOU
THE PARABLE
OF A FRAUD."

"HE'S NOT A
WIZARD. HE'S
AN ILLUSIONIST."

"WHEN THIS IS
FOUND OUT,
HE IS DEPOSED."

"HE PROTESTS;
EVERYONE THOUGHT
HE WAS A WIZARD AND
SO THE BALANCE OF
POWER TIPPED."

IF I CAN
FOCUS THE
NOISE A
LITTLE

"HE HAD TO
PROTECT THOSE
WHO HAD TAKEN
HIM IN."

"AND THE POWER
OF BULLSHIT WAS
ONE HE DID EXCEL
IN EXERCISING."

"CREATED A
BEAUTIFUL CITY,
A POWERFUL ARMY,
A GREAT LEGEND."

"BUT BEING A
GOOD MAN DOESN'T
EXCUSE HIM FROM
BEING A BAD
WIZARD."

MAYBE
IT CAN
BECOME

"IF AN ARTIST
DOESN'T TAKE A
MORAL STANCE
HE RUNS THE
RISK OF

BEING
DISMISSED
AS

"TRIAL

PROSPERO?"

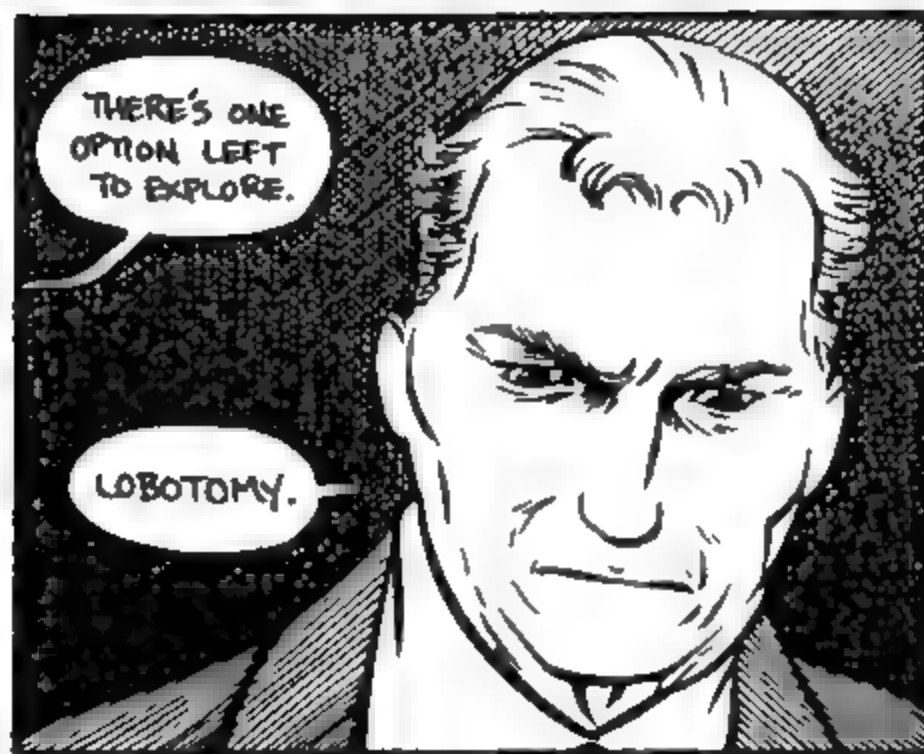
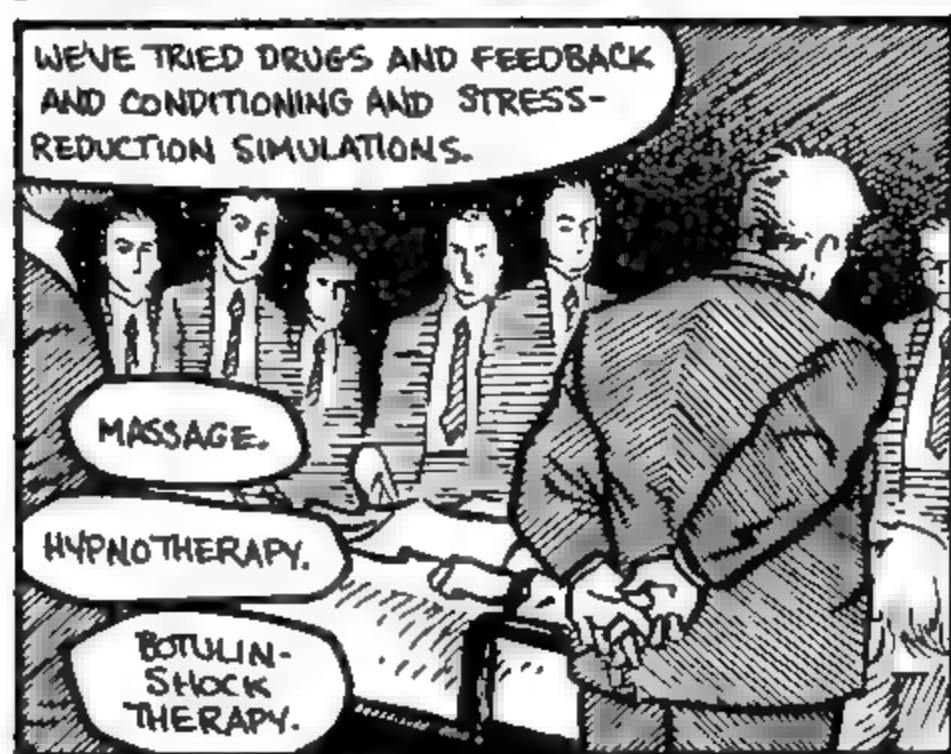
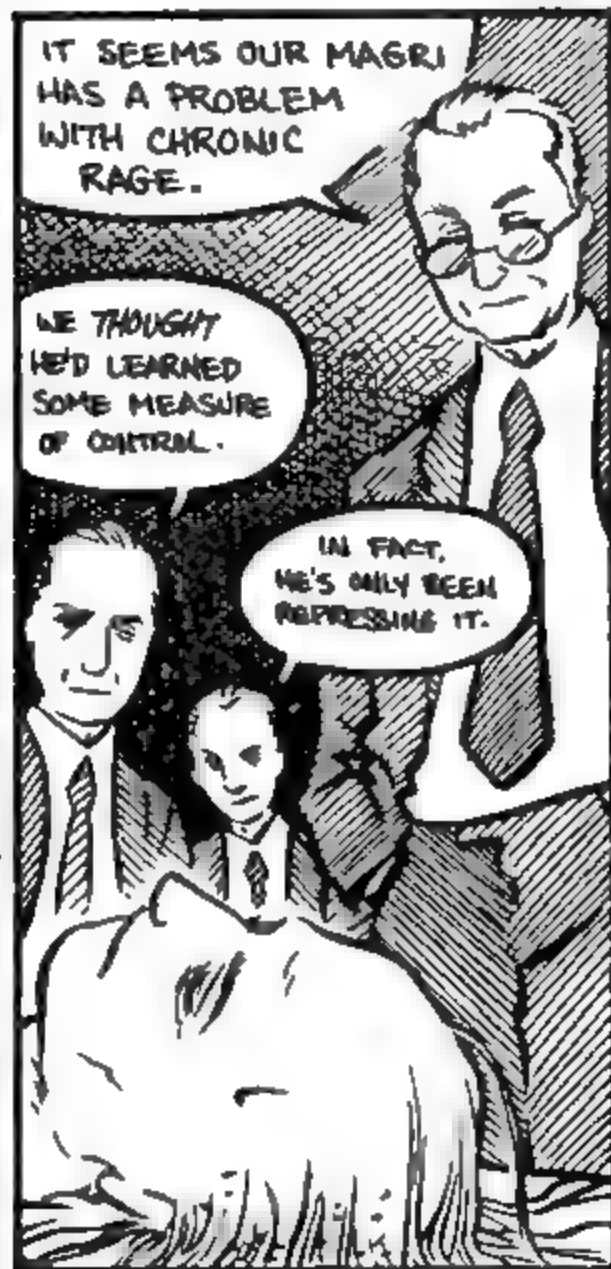
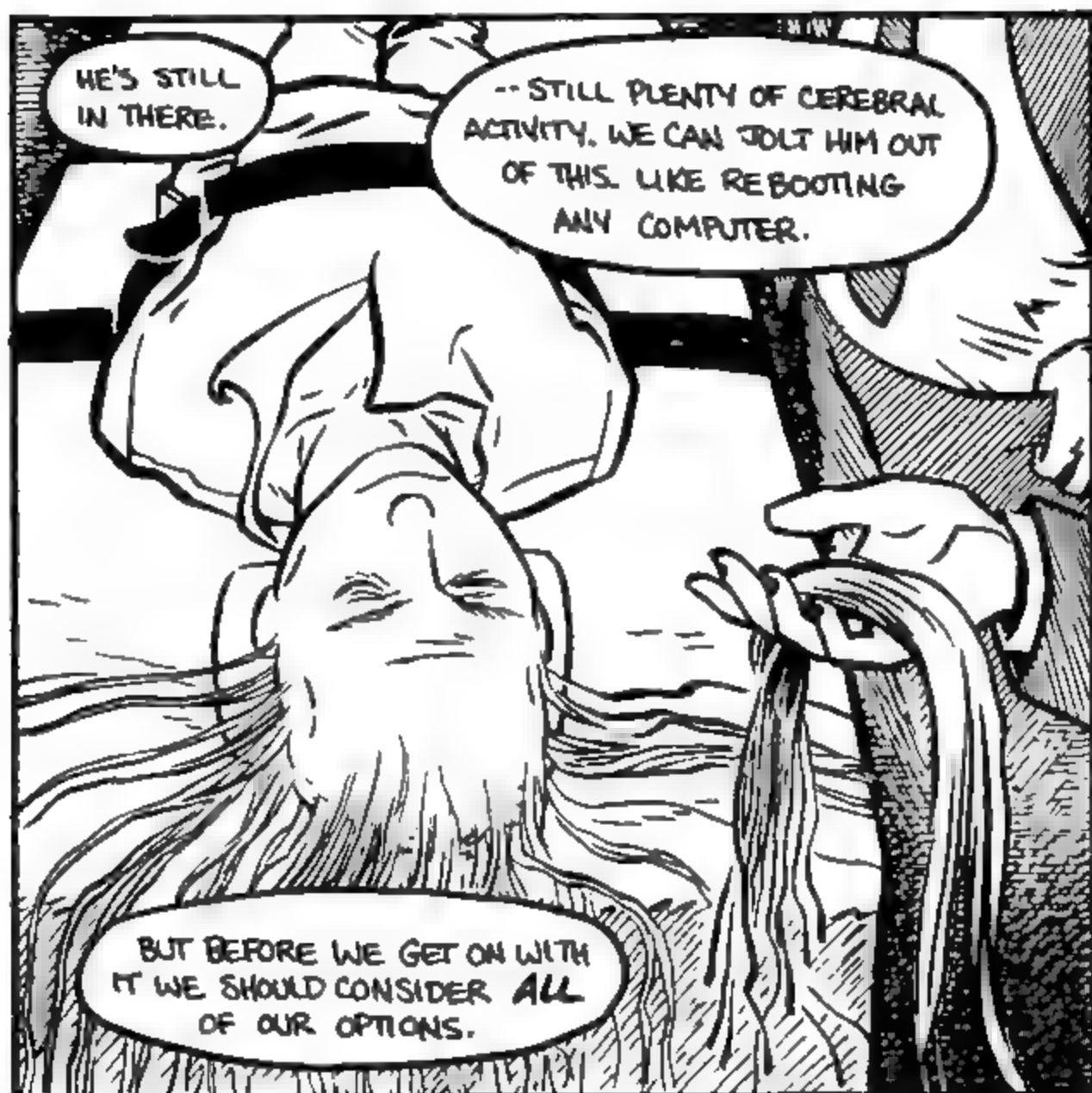
UNH!

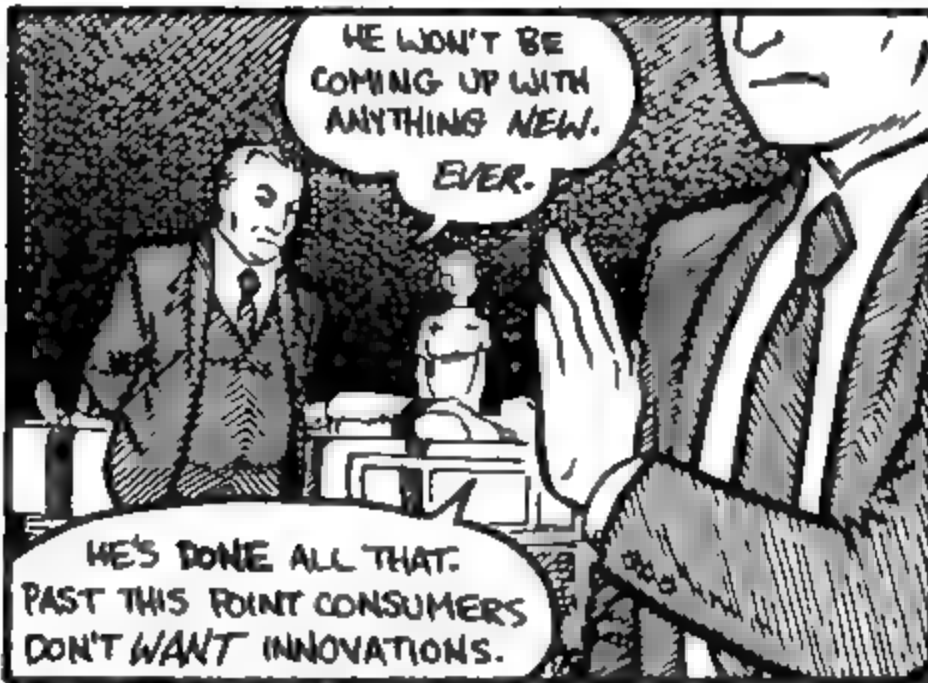
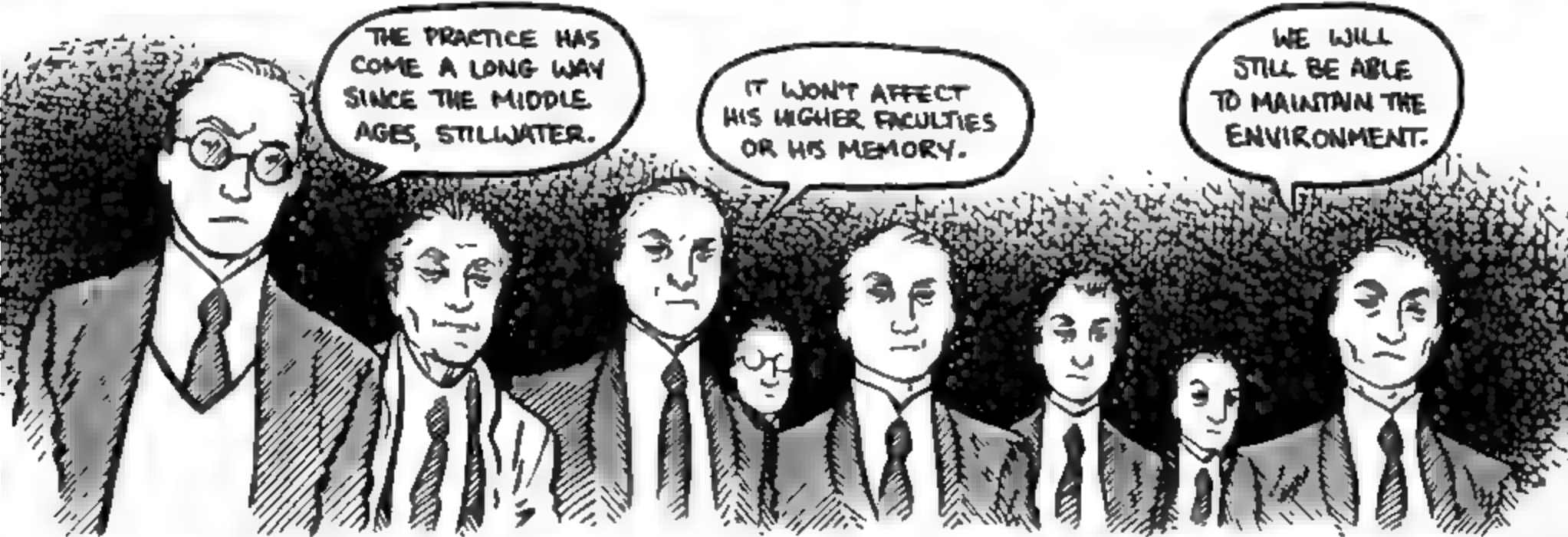
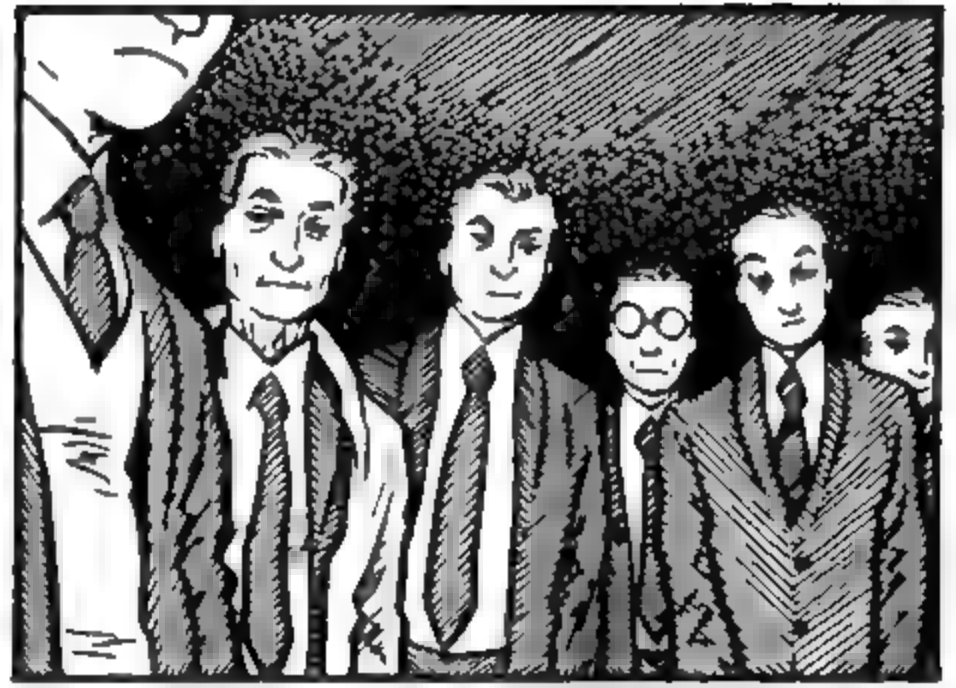




NOW.

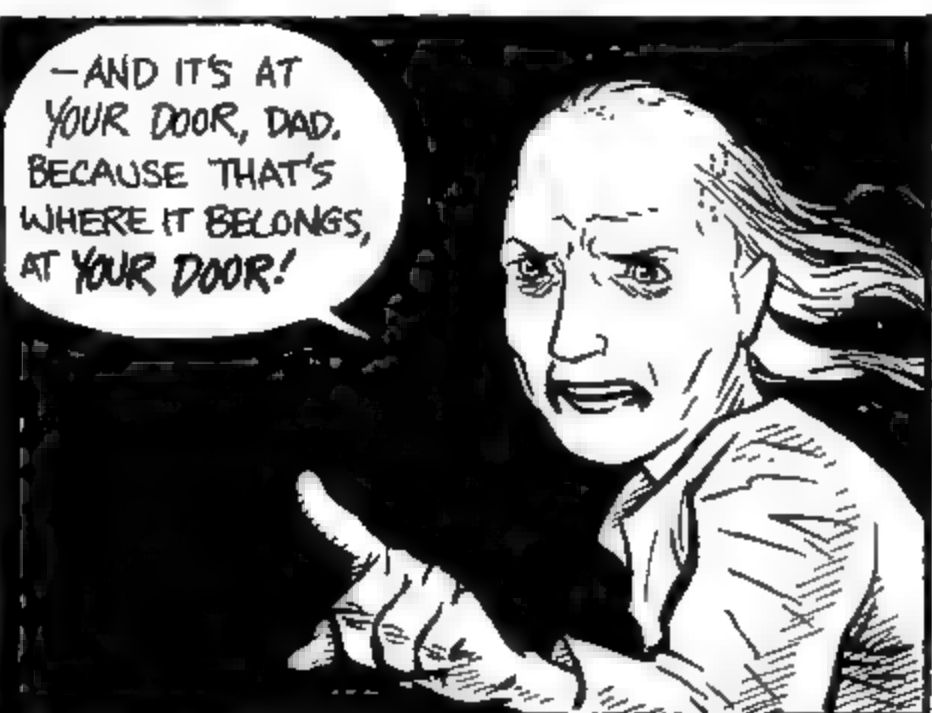
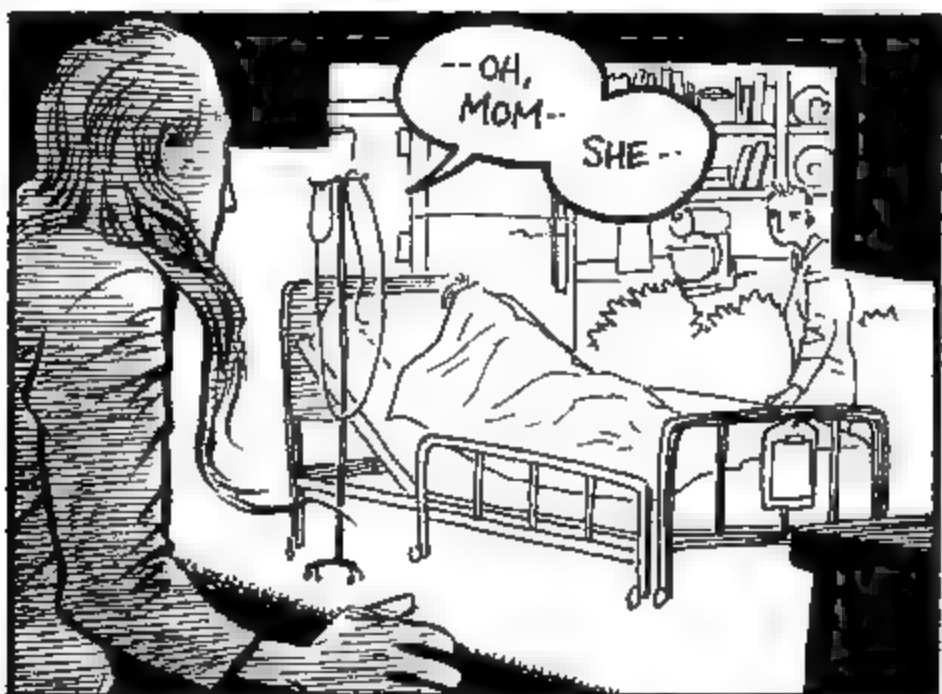
AS
I WAS
SAYING--

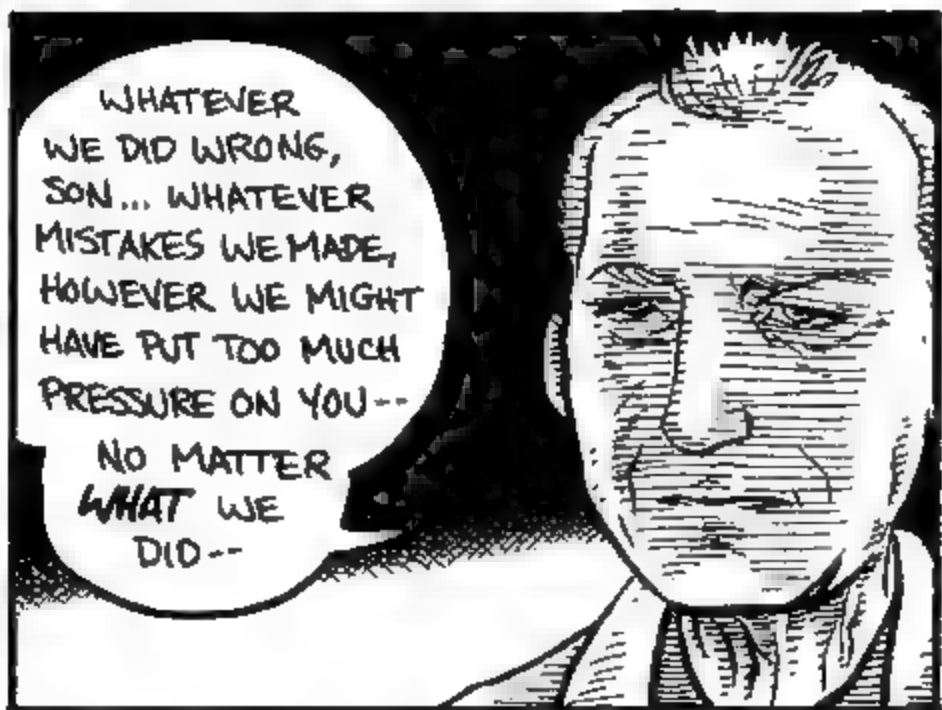


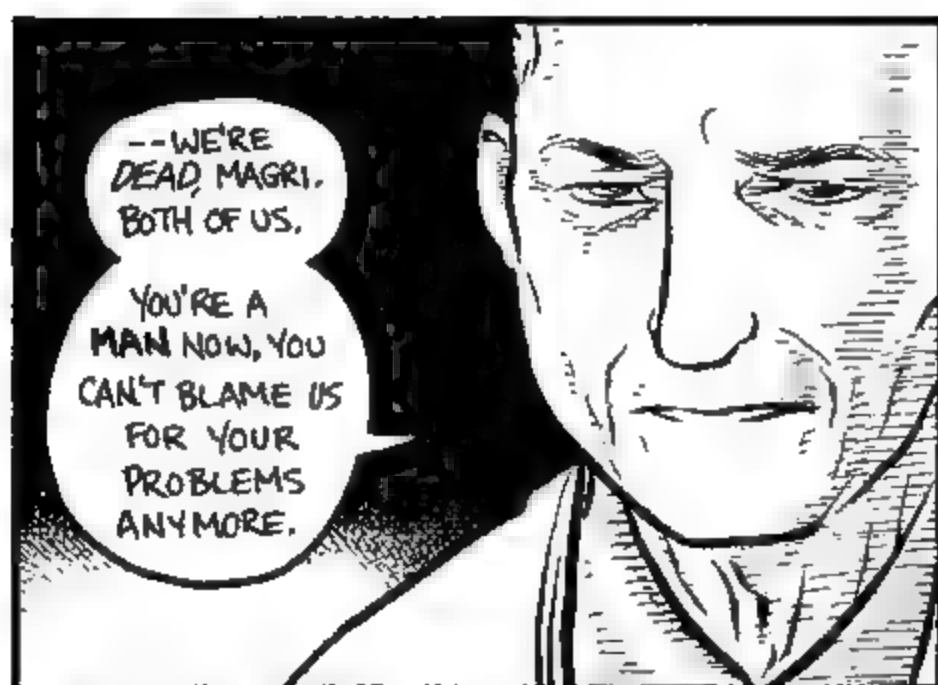












--WE'RE
DEAD, MAGRI.
BOTH OF US.

YOU'RE A
MAN NOW, YOU
CAN'T BLAME US
FOR YOUR
PROBLEMS
ANYMORE.



OH YES I
**FUCKING
CAN!**



YOU'RE **BANISHED**,
YOU GET ME? I'M
GOING TO **FORGET**
THIS WHOLE HOUSE--
TEAR IT DOWN--
CUT IT OUT!



I DON'T EVER WANT
TO SEE IT AGAIN--
OR YOU-- OR HER!
IT'S **MY** MIND. I
CAN DO WHAT I
WANT **HERE**
AT **LEAST!**



DON'T YOU **DARE**
PUT THIS ON ME--

YOU **WHORED**
ME OUT--

YOU'D NEVER ADMIT
IT IN A HUNDRED
YEARS BUT YOU
KNOW IT'S TRUE!



OH, PLEASE,
PLEASE, LET THE
WHOLE CLAN SUCK
MY GODDAMN
BRAIN AND CALL ME
DERIVATIVE, WHY
NOT, I'M AN
ASSHOLE ANY-
WAY, EVERY-
BODY SAYS
SO...



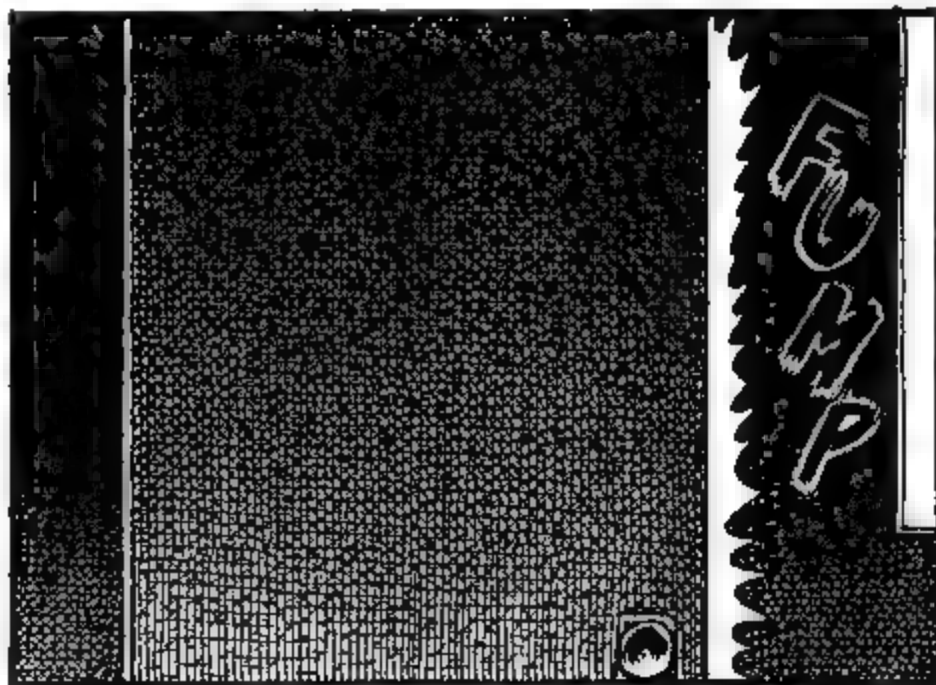
-- NEVER SAID I WAS
A GENIUS, I NEVER SAID--
HOPE I WAS BUT--

-- SHIT --

CAN'T HELP
SEEING OTHER
PEOPLE'S WORK...
I TRIED TO BE
A BRAIN IN A
JAR, I TRIED
I TRIED



-- IS IT STILL
A RIP-OFF IF I
DO IT REALLY
WELL?







YOU

YOU'VE DONE
NOTHING YOU DO
NOTHING

NEVER STOLE A
CAR NEVER BATHED
A BABY

NEVER GOT
DRUNK AND
GROPED A GOOD
FRIEND AND THEN
HAD TO LIE
ABOUT IT

JUST WANDER
THE STREETS AND
WON'T TALK TO
ANYBODY

WE'RE DOCTORS
TEACHERS TATTOOISTS
JUDGES JANITORS
FALCONERS AND
YOU



YOU'RE
SO FAR UP
YOUR OWN ASS
YOU'RE PEERING
OVER YOUR OWN
COLLAR BUT
YOU STILL
CAN'T SEE!

AND YOU HAVE
THE NERVE TO
LOOK SURPRISED?
FUCK YOU!

GET
OUT!

GET
OUT!

GET
OUT!

WHAT IN THE HELL
IS IT DOING?

-- BIZARRE
CAUSTHENICS--

--TURNING,
TURNING,
TURNING IN
PLACE--

(BOOKSTORE)

--STRETCHING
JERKILY--

-- HOPPING,
SWINGING
THE HAMMER
LEFT, LEFT,
RIGHT--

I KNOW
THIS!
WHAT?

COLD,
COLD
RECOGNITION
I'VE
SEEN THIS
I
KNOW
THIS

CAN'T
THINK
(VIDEO
GAME)
WHAT??

NO TIME TO
LET IT
(VIDEO
GAME)

SINK
IN

ULWRKK



IN THE
BOOKSTORE



I WASN'T
PLAYING
I NEVER
PLAY

I WAS
WATCHING



THE GIRLS

IN THE
BOOKSTORE

I
KNOW
YOU.

THE GIRLS WERE
PLAYING THEIR
VIDEO GAME.

REPETITIVE
BEEPS, CLANGS,
ROARS, CHIRPS



HENRI DE
ST-MARTIN.

WHENEVER
SOMEBODY
NEW

YOU...
YOU'RE A BIRD
TRAINER. YOU HATE
COFFEE. YOU HAVE A
RECURRENT DREAM
ABOUT A TENNIS-
RACKET HANDLE.



JOAN
STRATH-
MORE...

WHENEVER
SOMEBODY
NEW

KETHLEN
PERRY...

BOBBY
DREXEL...

GINA
DODSON...

WHENEVER
SOMEBODY
NEW TOOK
OVER THE
CONTROLS



THE ONSCREEN
FIGURE

VACAN
AMRITSSARIAN...

SHIN
RYAN...

DID THAT
STRANGE
WORKOUT
ROUTINE.

YOU'RE
ALL
ASLEEP.

THAT WAS THE
NEW PLAYER
LEARNING THE
INTERFACE.

PEOPLE MAY WEB SURF
IN PLACE OF SLEEP.
BUT NOBODY SURFS
UNCONSCIOUS.

THE SITES ARE
SUPPOSED TO DENY
ENTRY IF THEIR
SIGNALS ARE TOO
GARBLED. THESE...
ARE SLEEP-
WALKERS.

NIGHTMARE
WALKERS.

ELSEWHERE
HAS NO
SHERIFF.

UNLESS
IT'S ME.

SHHH

WHO
LET THEM
IN?

You.

AAAAUHH

IN DREAMS.
I BELIEVE IT
WHEN I SEE IT
IN DREAMS.

IN EVERY LIVING
THING THERE IS A VOICE
THAT TELLS IT TO LIE
DOWN AND DIE.

YOU DON'T
HAVE TO LISTEN
TO IT...

BUT THAT'S
NOT ALL IT
HAS TO SAY...

TEARS OF THE COCOON.
SIR, IF YOU REALLY GAVE A
SHIT ABOUT MAKEUP WHITE, YOU
WOULDN'T HAVE LET HIM GROW
UP SO SOFT.

MY BOY
HATE YOU GIVE
ANY THOUGHT TO
THE ACTS?
WHERE
IS IT?

WE'RE PARTY
TO THE RUIN OF
A RARE THING,
PUNKS...

I HAD HOPED
THAT IF THEY SAW
ME, THEY WOULDNT
BE ABLE TO VOTE
FOR SURGERY.
ME AND MY MAMMA
ARE SUCH UGLY MAMMA

u u
BROO TO
DRINK TO

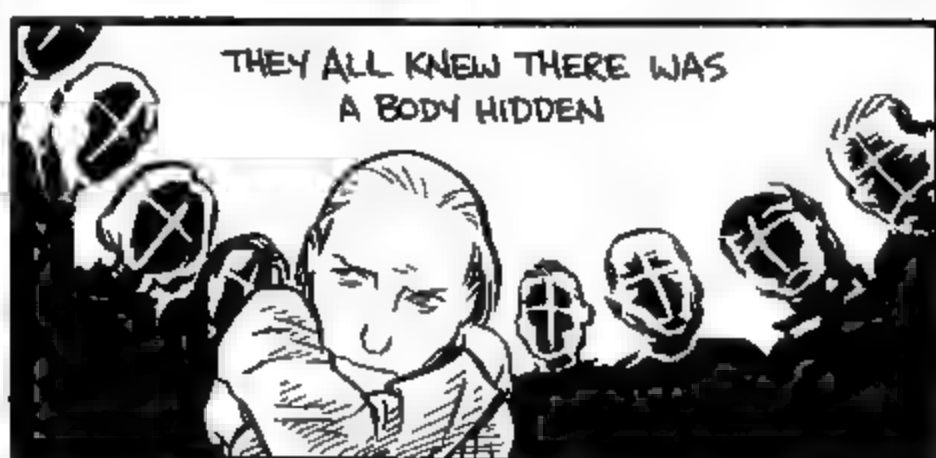
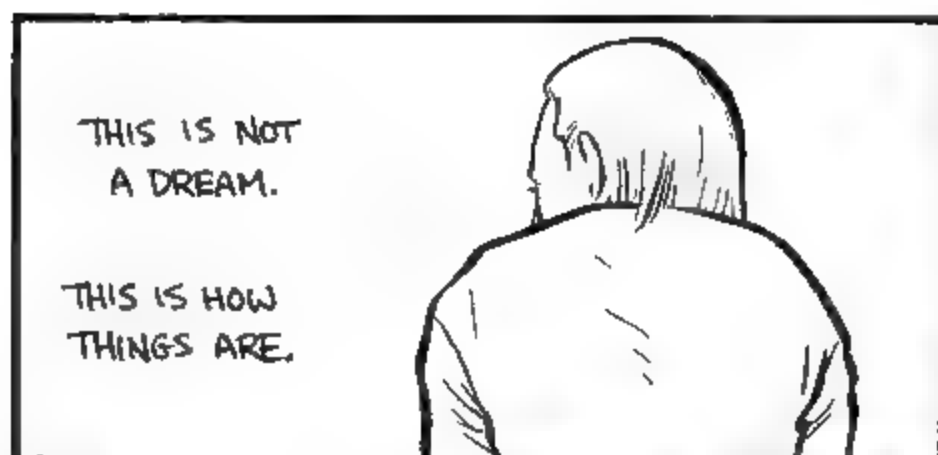
HOWA

WHERE
DO ELSE
WHERE
DO ELSE
WHERE
DO ELSE
WHERE
DO ELSE

GOD
GOD
GOD

IT'S LIKE, YOUR
PERSPECTIVE'S FUCKED.
YOU GOTTA LET YOUR HANDS
BE STRAIGHT.

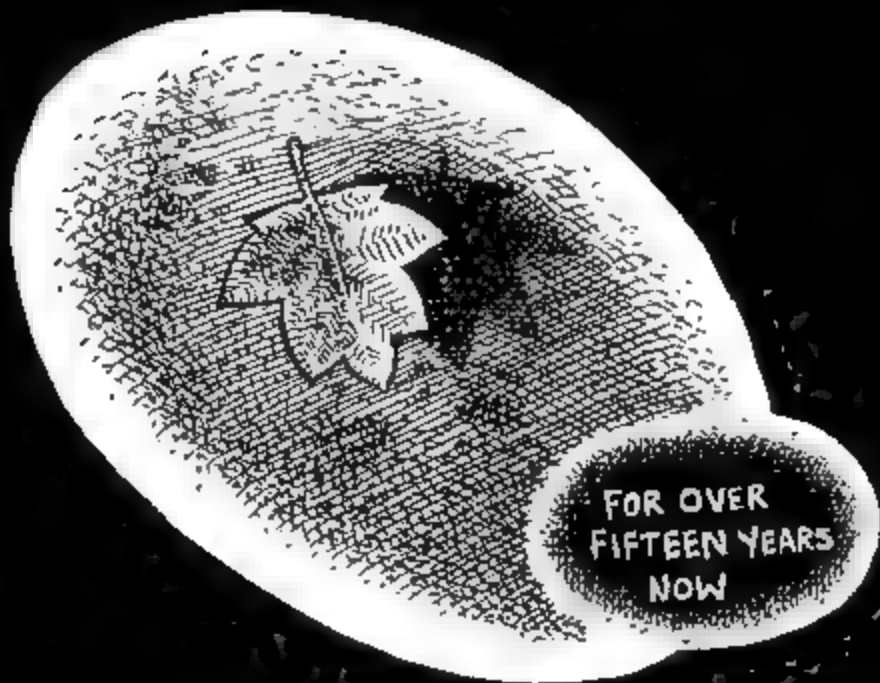
YOU
EVER





CHAPTER SEVEN





FOR OVER
FIFTEEN YEARS
NOW



MY ENTIRE
LIFE HAS BEEN
BENT ON



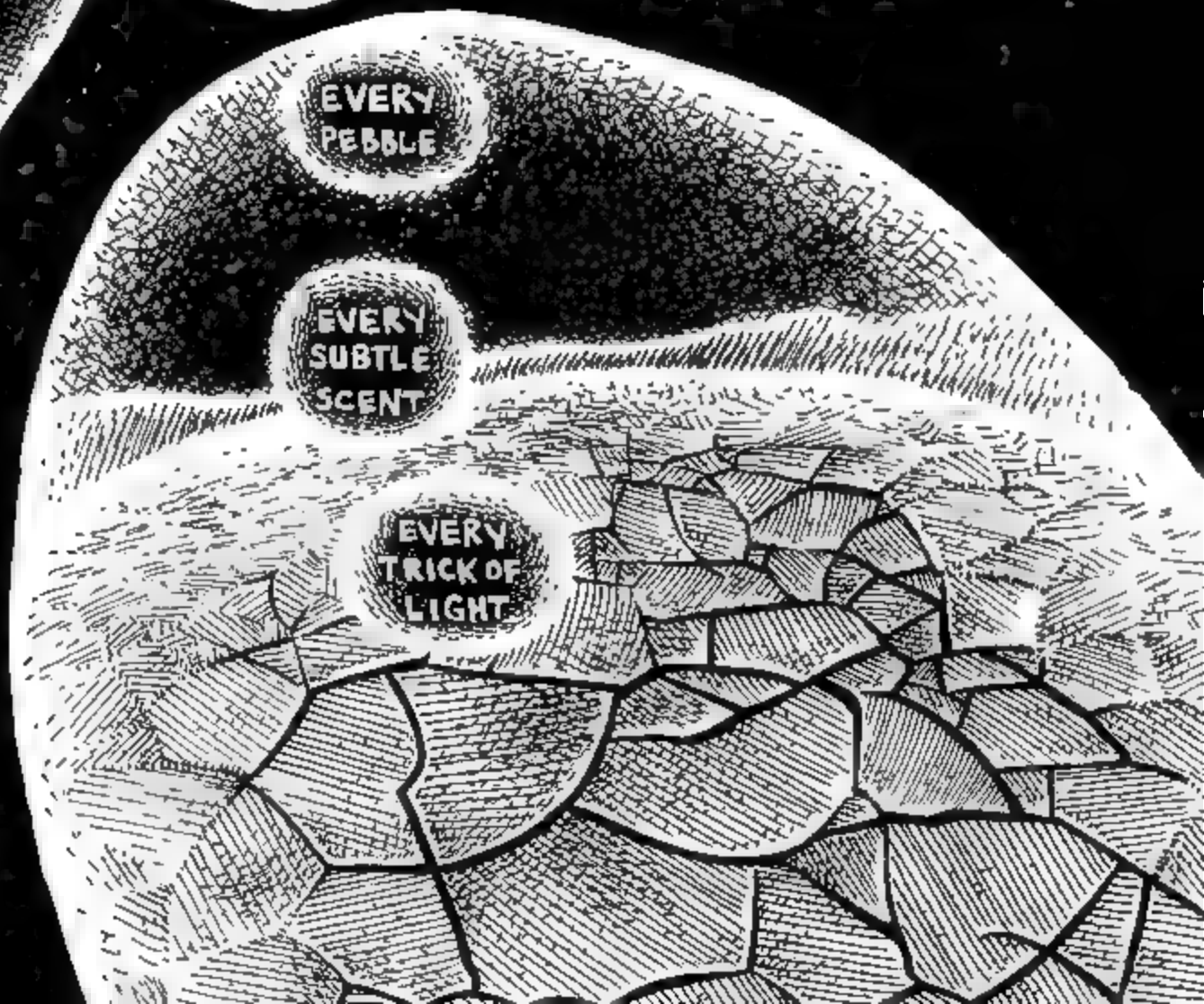
KEEPING
ALL THE DETAILS
OF MY DREAM
WORLD



CONCRETE
IN MY
HEAD



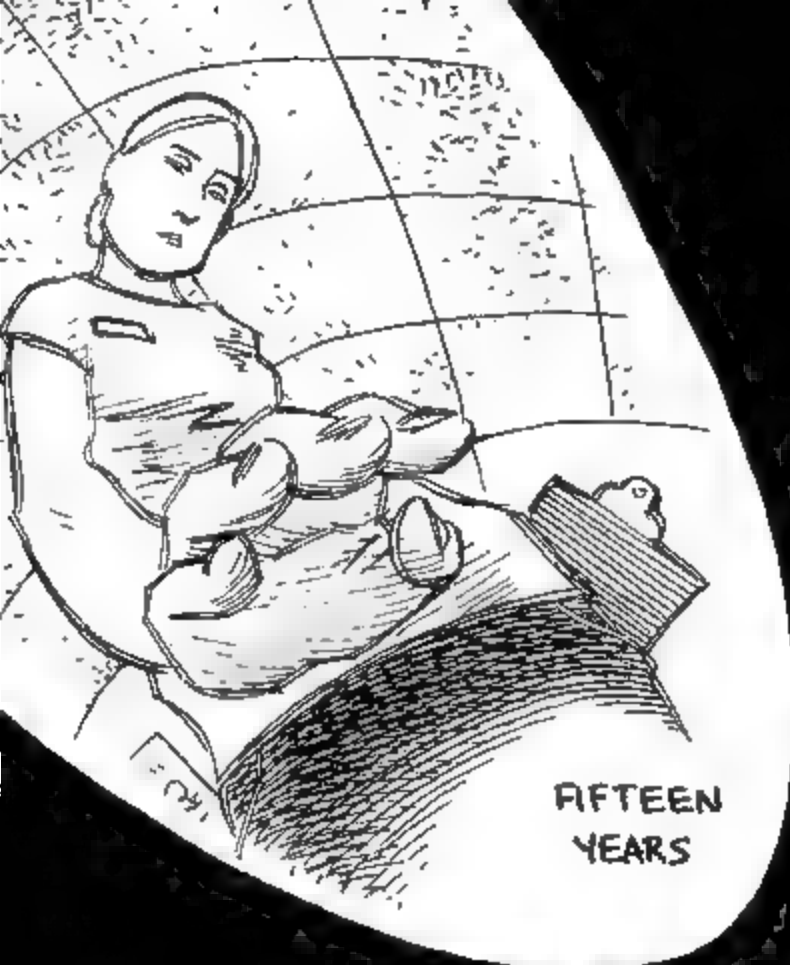
EVERY
LEAF



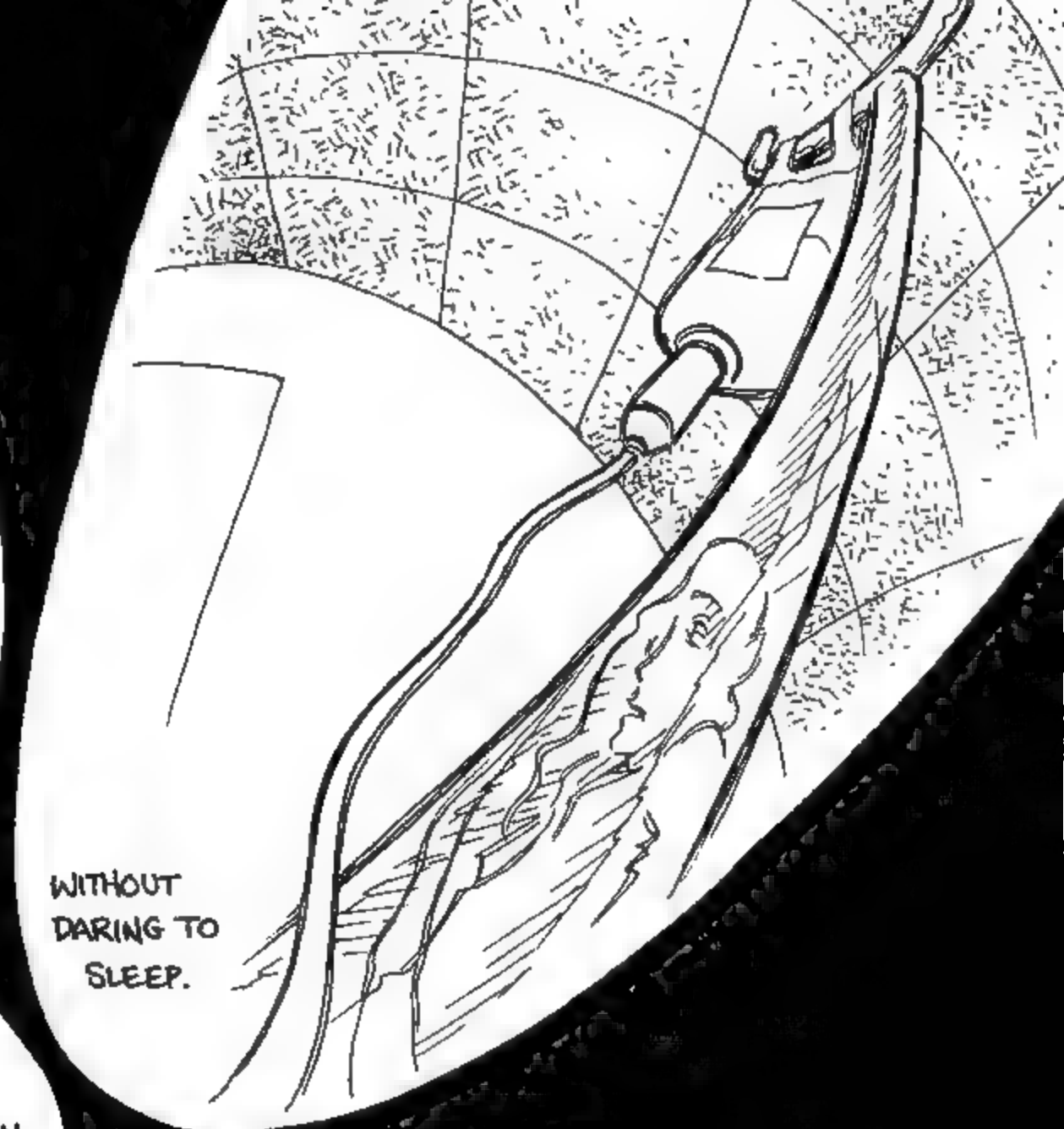
EVERY
PEBBLE

EVERY
SUBTLE
SCENT

EVERY
TRICK OF
LIGHT



FIFTEEN
YEARS



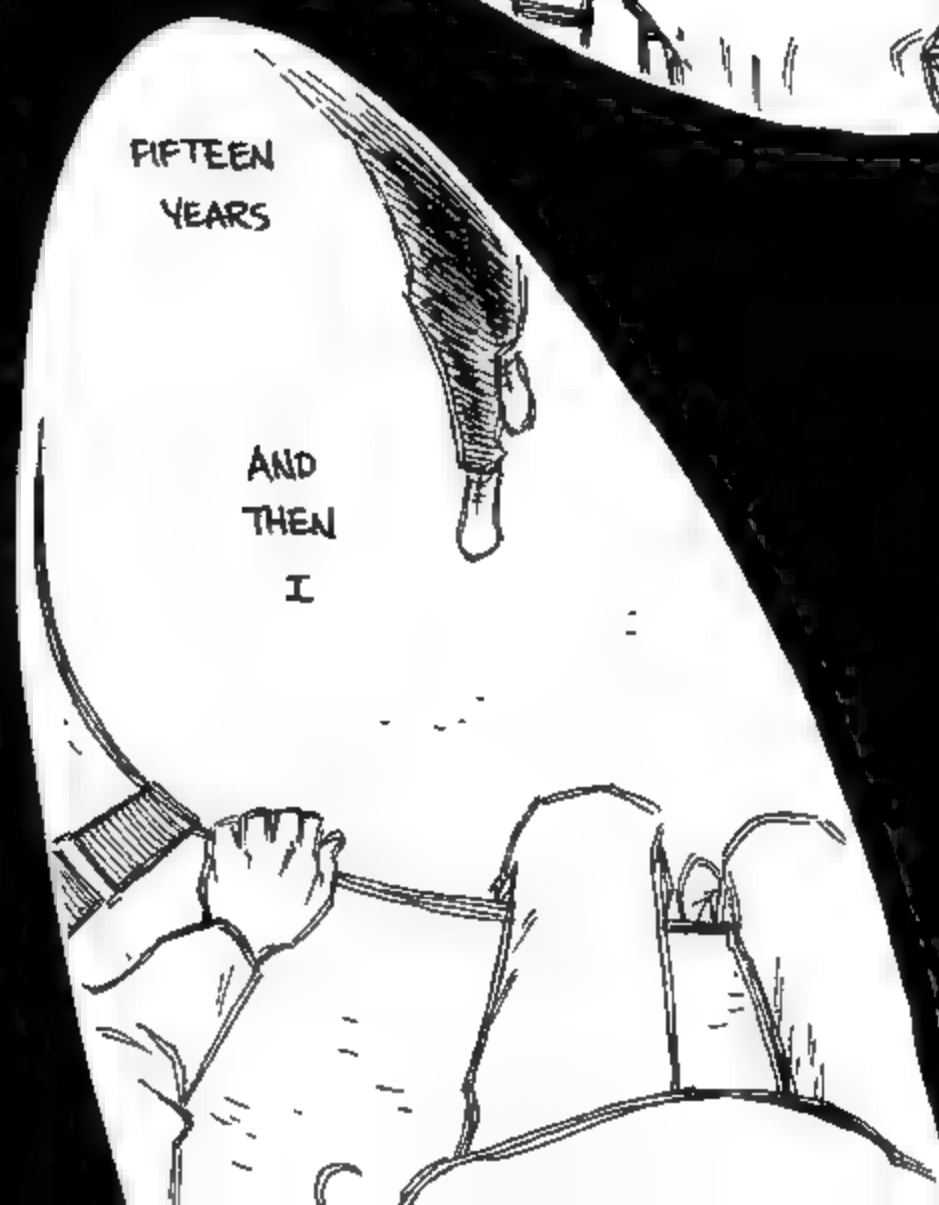
WITHOUT
DARING TO
SLEEP.



FIFTEEN
YEARS



WHEN YOU
DON'T SLEEP, YOU'RE
NEVER REALLY
AWAKE.



FIFTEEN
YEARS

AND
THEN
I

AND THEN I

THEN I

AND THEN
I WOKE UP.

MR.
WHITE?

MR.
WHITE?

I'M ALL
RIGHT.

I FEEL
A BIT
LIGHT
HEADED.



THIS IS VERY STRANGE.

I FEEL LIKE A FLY.

THERE ARE WAY TOO MANY CAMERAS IN THIS BUILDING, AND I CAN'T SEEM TO TURN ANY OF THEM OFF.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. KEEP WALKING.

MY EYES HURT, AND I FEEL SO HEAVY... LIKE MY BODY'S JUST A PUPPET I'M PUSHING AROUND... PEOPLE TALK BUT IT DOESN'T REGISTER... AND I FORGET WHAT THEY SAY...

YOU JUST NEED MORE SLEEP.

NO, I-- WELL, YES, I CERTAINLY NEED MORE SLEEP... BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I DON'T FORGET THINGS.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT I DON'T FORGET THINGS... SOME VERY IMPORTANT THINGS...

WHAT THINGS?

LEFT, LEFT-- FRONT DOOR'S THIS WAY--

I, UH...

I HAD A REALLY GOOD DREAM... AND NOW IT'S GETTING SO... SO VAGUE...

IT WAS THE KIND OF DREAM... THAT'S ABOUT HOW THINGS REALLY ARE...

I WAS... THERE WERE ALL THESE PEOPLE, ALL CHASING THIS GUY, CALLING HIM A KILLER... GOING TO STRING HIM UP, YOU KNOW? MAKE AN EXAMPLE OUT OF HIM... AND I KNEW HE HADN'T DONE ANYTHING...

I KNEW THEY WERE... JUST USING HIM... TO COVER UP THEIR OWN...

... AND I KNEW... IF I FOUND HIM, I COULD SAVE HIM... HE COULD JUST WALK RIGHT OUT WITH ME, NOBODY'D DARE TOUCH HIM, BECAUSE ESSENTIALLY I AM THE COMPANY...

... HUH.

No.

THAT WASN'T IT.

MAGRI!

WHERE IS HE TAKING MAGRI?

IN THE DREAM I WAS THE KILLER. BUT THERE NEVER REALLY WAS ANYBODY KILLED.

THAT'S WHY THE... CORPSE... WAS ALL WRAPPED UP. IT WASN'T A PERSON.

IT WAS A SECRET.

A SECRET I DIDN'T WANT FOUND OUT.

I'D LOST CONTROL OVER... IT WAS MY COMPANY, MY RESPONSIBILITY... THEY COULDN'T HURT ME, SO...

THEY...

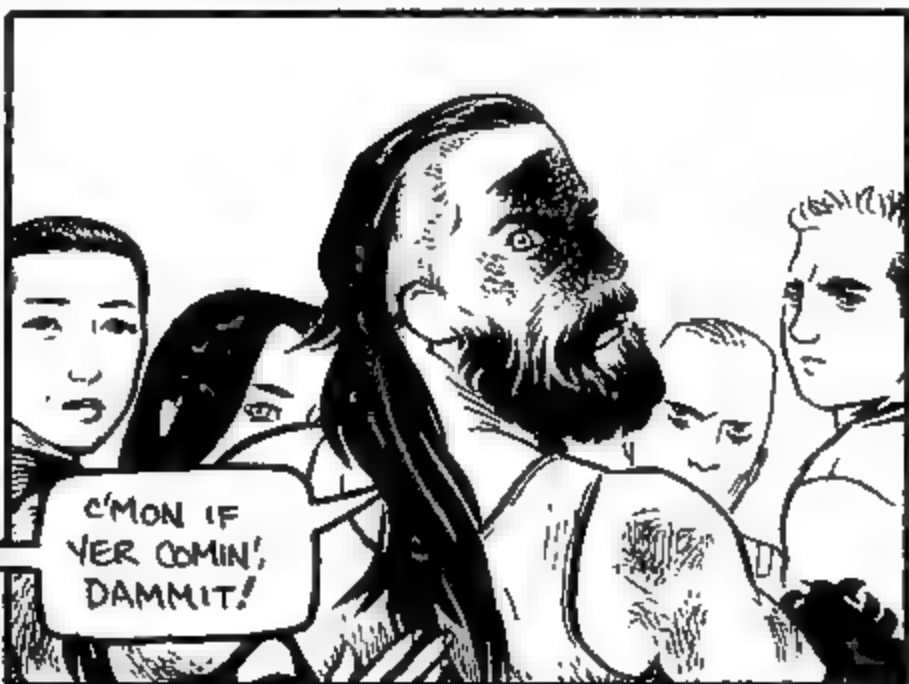
THEY FOUND A...

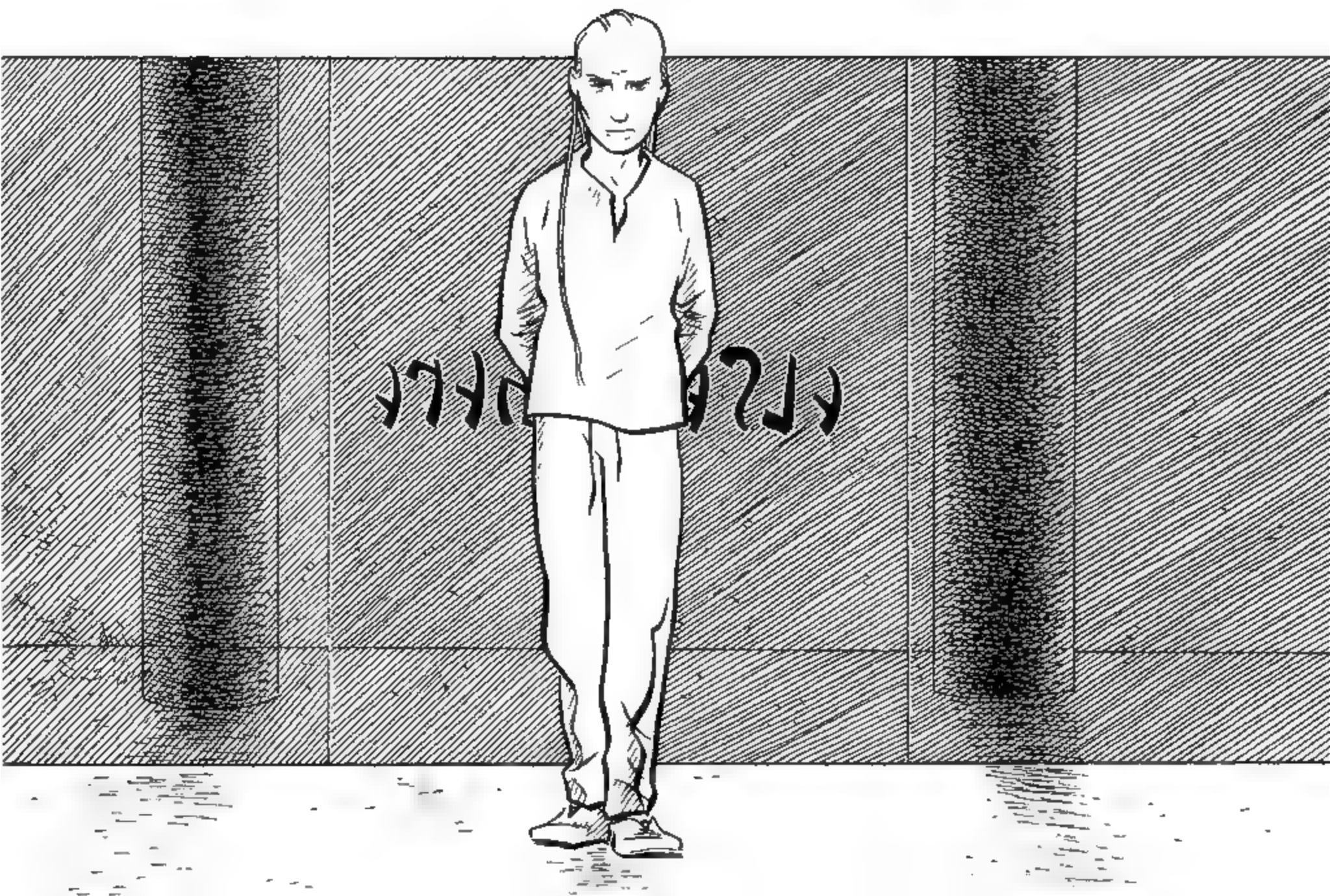
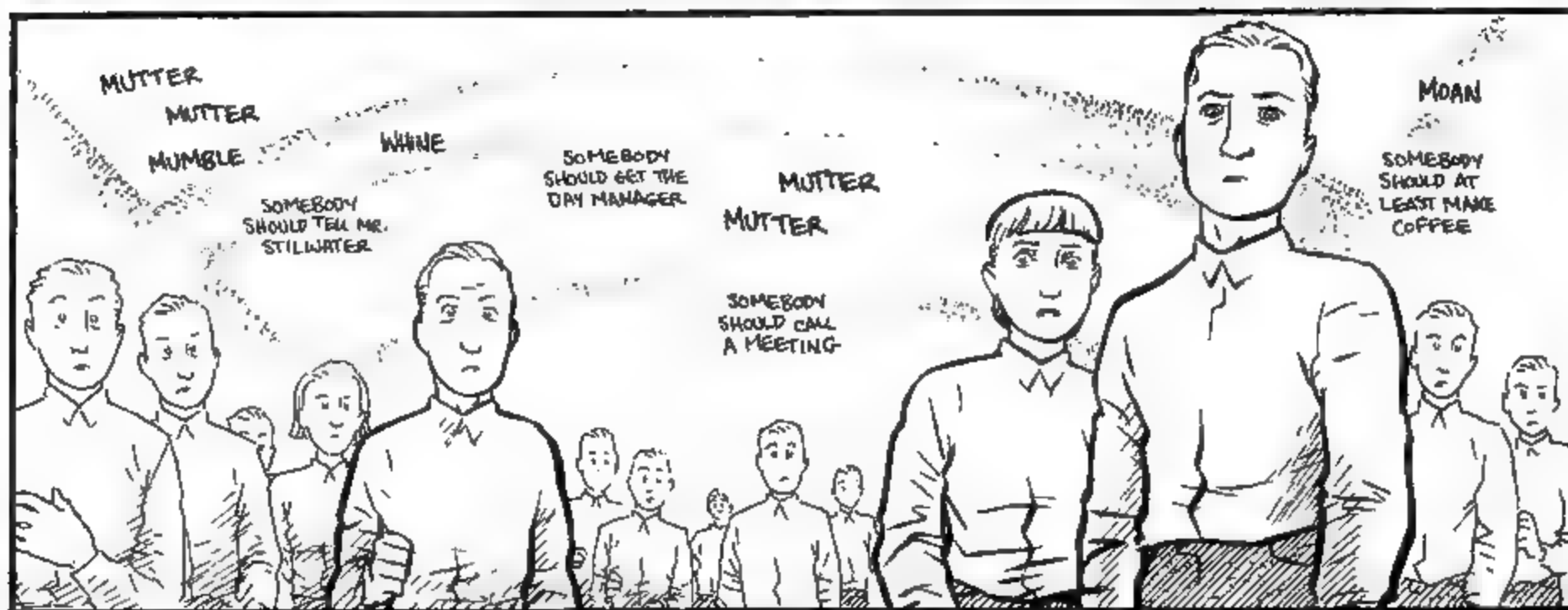
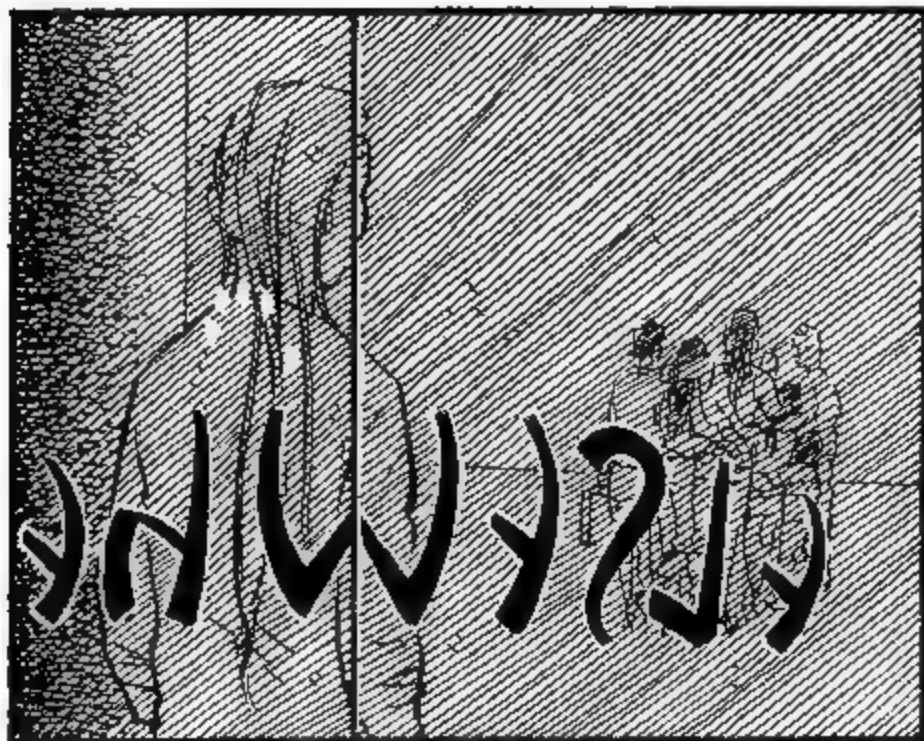
GOT TO STOP THIS!

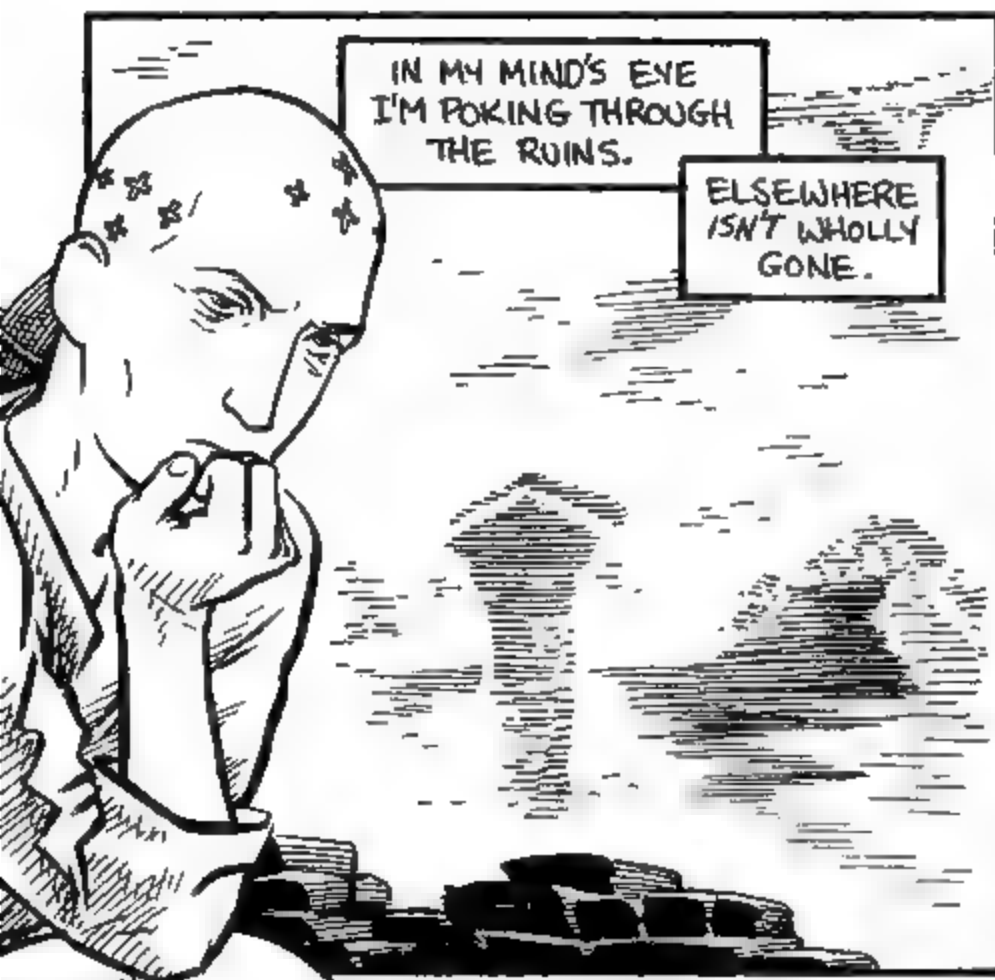
A SCAPE-GOAT.

FORGIVE ME.

FORGET IT.







IN MY MIND'S EYE
I'M POKING THROUGH
THE RUINS.

ELSEWHERE
ISN'T WHOLLY
GONE.



IN THE BOARDROOM, THE JUNIOR SUITS
(OH, DO EXCUSE ME, THE EXECUTIVE VICE
PRESIDENTS) ARE PICKING MY BONES.

WE GOT TO LIVE
THIS NEW WORLD
SOMEHOW.

"ANYWHERE".

"EVERYWHERE!"

NO NO, JUST
"ELSEWHERE II".
PEOPLE NEED
STABILITY.



THE HIGH POINTS,
THE BIG STUFF,
ISLANDS OF
MEMORY.

IT'S COMING BACK
TO ME SLOWLY, IF
I CONCENTRATE.

ONE THING'S NEW. I WAS NEVER
THIS GOOD AT STRADDLING BOTH
POINTS OF VIEW.

THIS ISN'T
A SEQUEL. IT'S
AN ITERATION.

YES!

WHAT THEY KNEW
BEFORE WILL BE LIKE A
ROUGH DRAFT COMPARED
TO WHAT WE GIVE THEM
NOW.

AHEM. WHAT
MAGRI GIVES
THEM NOW.



MISTY AND VAGUE,
RENDERING UP THEIR
REAL MEANINGS ONLY
IF I CAN GET CLOSE.

FRAGMENTED.

FLAT.

MOSTLY
EMPTY.

WE MIGHT BE
ABLE TO DOWNLOAD
PARTS OF OLD ELSEWHERE
FROM RETURNING
VISITORS' MEMORIES.

ON THE QT, OF
COURSE - A DISCREET
SCAN UPON ENTERING.
WE'LL JUST CATCH
WHAT'S FOREMOST IN
THEIR MINDS.

THAT WAY
WE CAN GIVE THEM
EXACTLY WHAT THEY
EXPECT.

WHAT MADE ELSEWHERE DIFFERENT WAS THE MIND.



IT WAS IN MY HEAD. SO NOTHING IN IT SEEMED ILLOGICAL OR INCOMPLETE. LIKE IN DREAMS.

ALSO... MY VISITORS... THEIR MINDS WERE IN MY MIND. THEY FILLED IN A LOT OF THE DETAILS-- NOT SOME MAINFRAME STRUGGLING TO DRAW THINGS IN JUST AROUND EVERY CORNER, RACING TO KEEP UP WITH THEIR PERIPHERAL VISION AS THEY SPIN.



ELSEWHERE IS MINE, SURE. INSIDE MY HEAD.



BUT IT ALWAYS WAS THE SUM OF MANY MINDS.



WE ALL HAVE TOTAL CONFIDENCE IN YOUR GIFTS, MAGRI -- IN YOUR CREATIVE VISION--

DON'T STRESS--

EVERYBODY GETS BLOCKED NOW AND THEN--



SHUT UP!

HE'S NOT BLOCKED!

OLD ELSEWHERE TOOK HIM YEARS TO CREATE! YOU CAN'T EXPECT MAGRI TO--

OAAH, WE ARE SOO... SCREWED

SSSTOP! TALKING! ABOUT IT!

IT'S LIKE IMPOTENCE!

THE MORE YOU DWELL ON IT THE WORSE IT GETS!

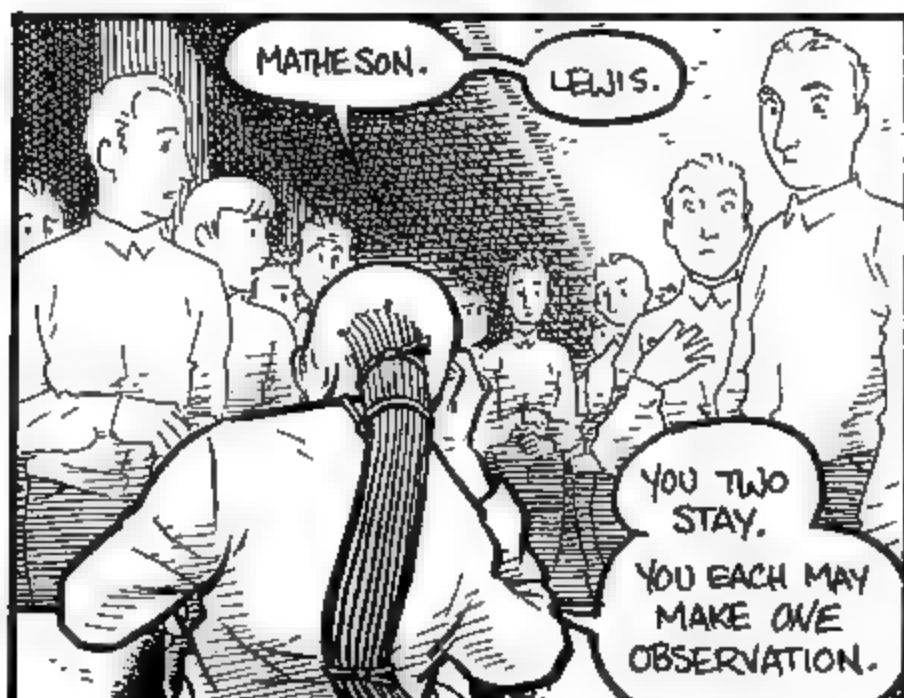
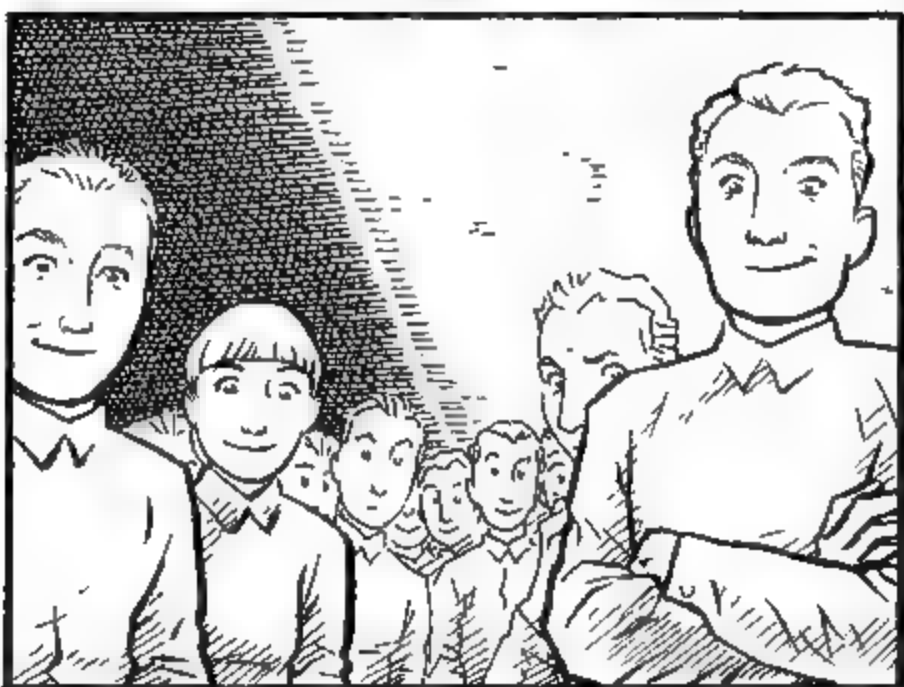
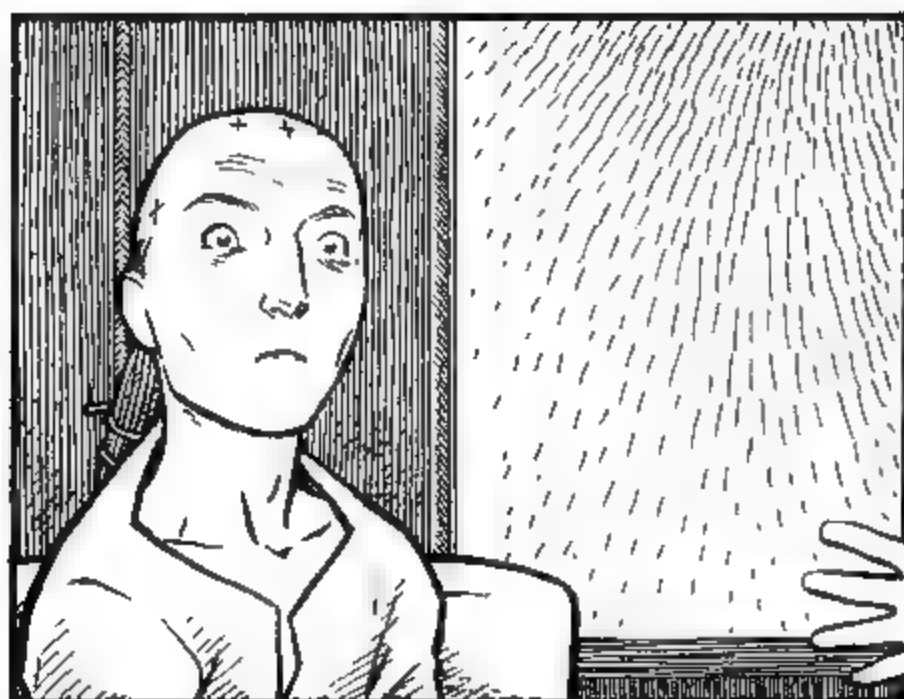
POSITIVE ENERGY POSITIVE ENERGY

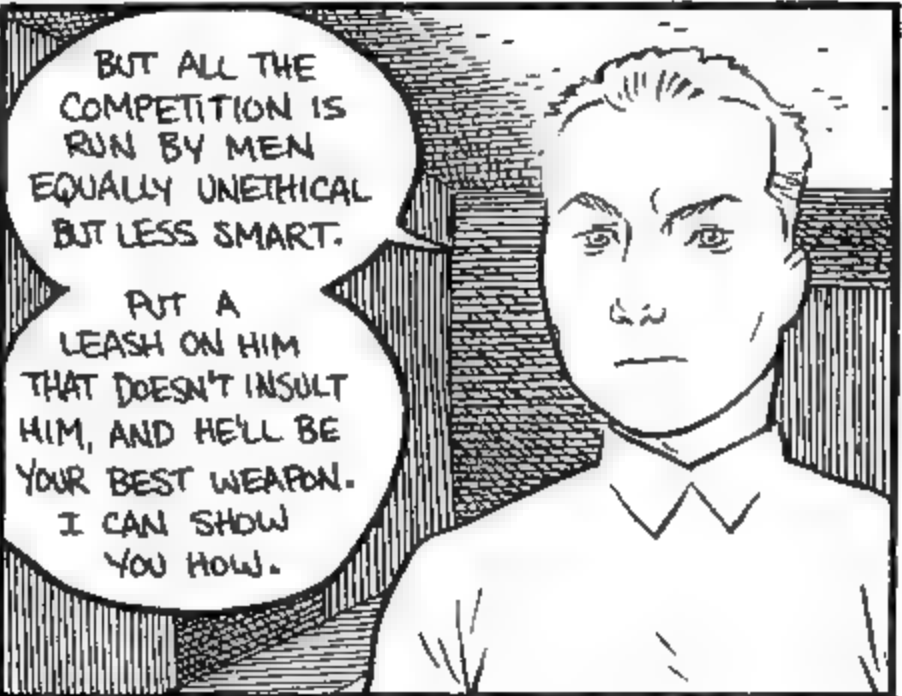
OOOH

HEY!

I GOT IT, I GOT IT! I GOT THE ANSWER! WE CAN HAVE ELSEWHERE BACK UP IN A WEEK!

MAGRI, YOU NEED A JOB!

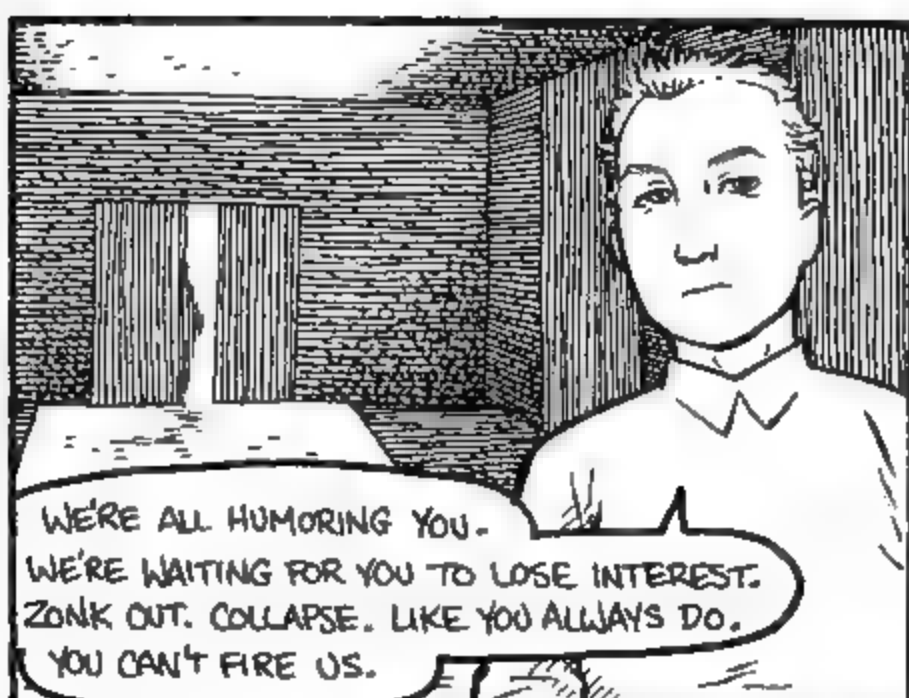




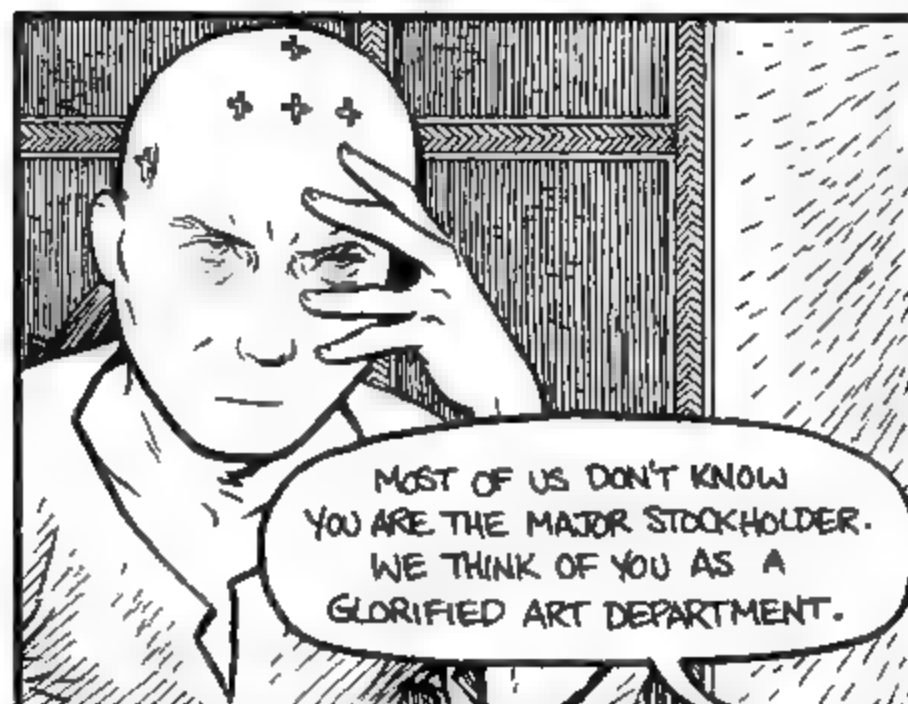


YOU'RE AS
BAD AS HE
IS. GET AWAY
FROM ME.

NEXT.



WE'RE ALL HUMORING YOU.
WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU TO LOSE INTEREST.
ZONK OUT. COLLAPSE. LIKE YOU ALWAYS DO.
YOU CAN'T FIRE US.



MOST OF US DON'T KNOW
YOU ARE THE MAJOR STOCKHOLDER.
WE THINK OF YOU AS A
GLORIFIED ART DEPARTMENT.



BY RIGHTS YOU'D
BE RUNNING THINGS.
BUT YOUR POWER IS
HELD IN PROXY.
YOUR FATHER SET
THAT UP.

KILL THE
PROXY. THEN
FIRE WHOMEVER
YOU WANT.



AND YOU CAN
TELL ME HOW
TO DO THAT.

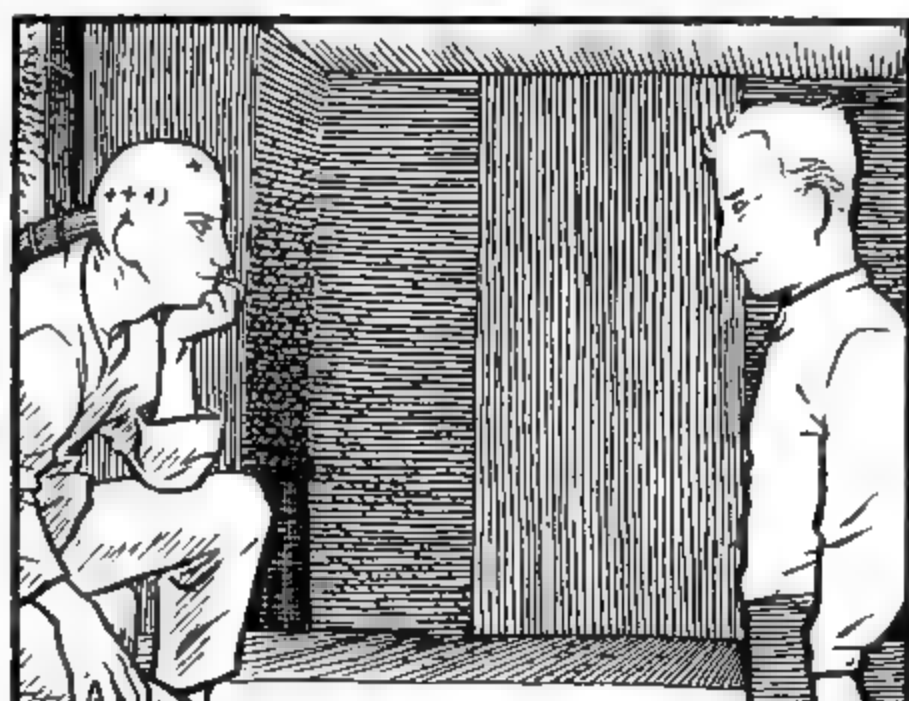
NO I
CAN'T.



== SIGH ==

ANYTHING
ELSE?

DON'T FIRE
CHESTER
STILWATER.



MY MIND
IS A
BLANK.

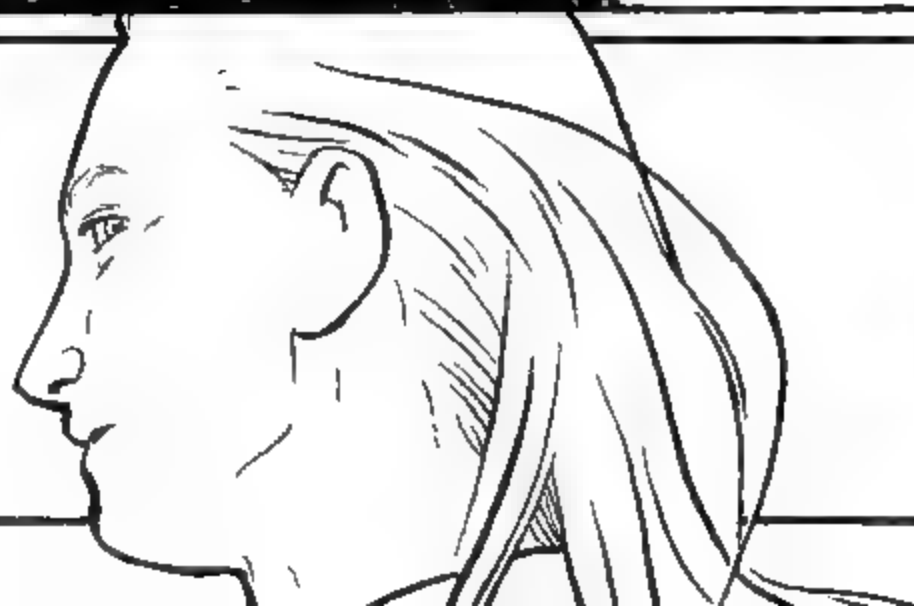


WHAT'S LEFT HAS BEEN...
REDUCED. IT FEELS FAKE.
FLAT, LIKE A DRAWING, AND
NOT A GOOD ONE.

I WONDER WHAT I
EVER SAW IN IT.



GOD. IT'S SO
BORING. I
CAN'T STAND
BOREDOM.
WHAT AM I
GONNA DO?



DAMN
YOU.



IF ONLY
YOU'D...

DONE AS
YOU WERE
TOLD...



IF YOU'D... JUST
KILLED YOURSELF...
WHEN YOU WERE
MEANT TO DIE...

YOU WOULDN'T...
HAVE HURT ALL
THOSE PEOPLE...



IT'SS... STILL
NOT TOO LATE...



YOU COULD HAVE
BEEN A DEMON
VOICE BY NOW...



OH, SHUT
UP.

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU ARE.
I **DO** KNOW YOU'RE
MINE TO DO WITH
AS I PLEASE.





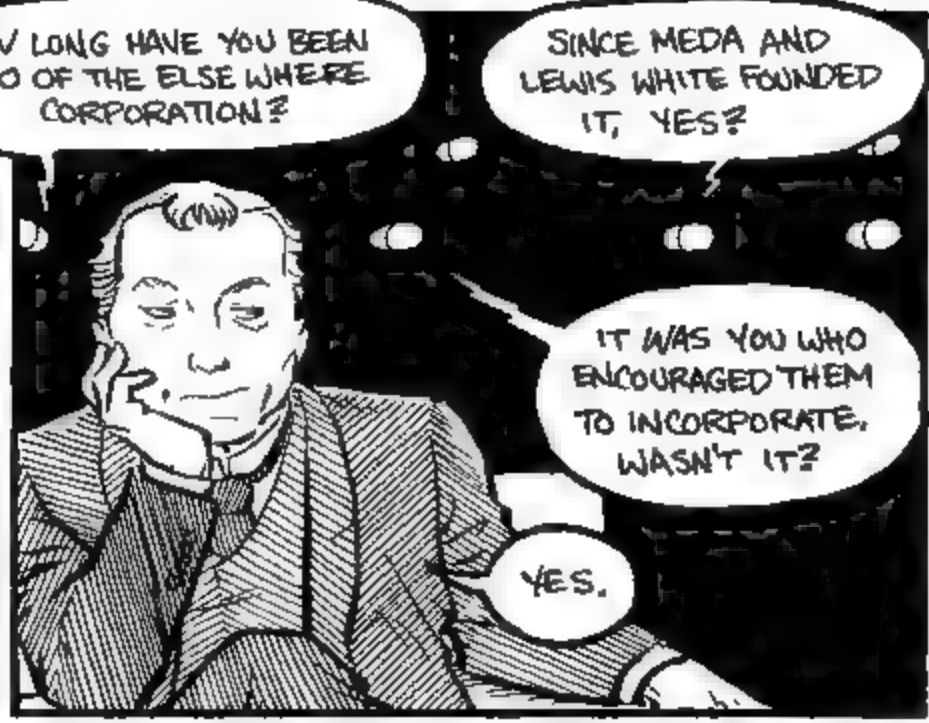
WELL,
WELL.

CHESTER
STILWATER.

STILL
WATERS,
INDEED.

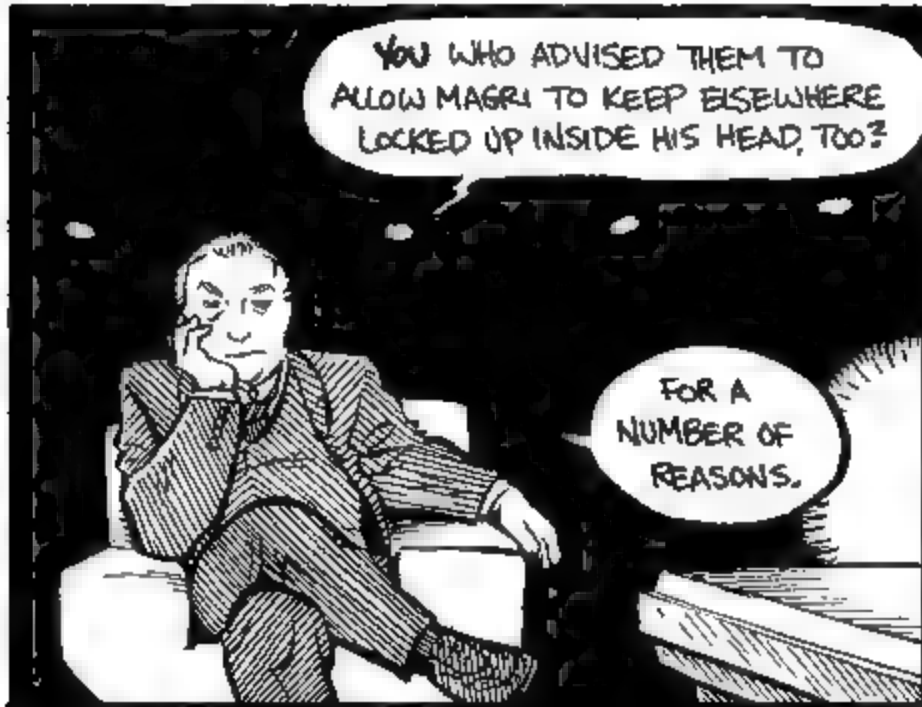
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN
CEO OF THE ELSE WHERE
CORPORATION?

SINCE MEDA AND
LEWIS WHITE FOUNDED
IT, YES?



IT WAS YOU WHO
ENCOURAGED THEM
TO INCORPORATE,
WASN'T IT?

YES.

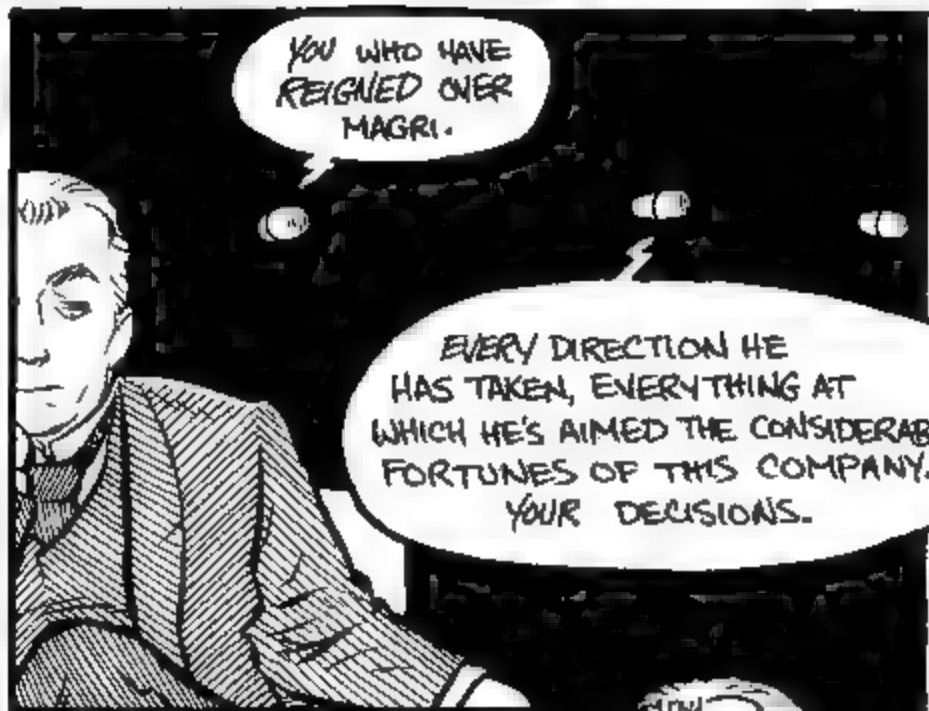


YOU WHO ADVISED THEM TO
ALLOW MAGRI TO KEEP ELSEWHERE
LOCKED UP INSIDE HIS HEAD, TOO?

FOR A
NUMBER OF
REASONS.



YES.
I DID
THAT.



YOU WHO HAVE
REIGNED OVER
MAGRI.

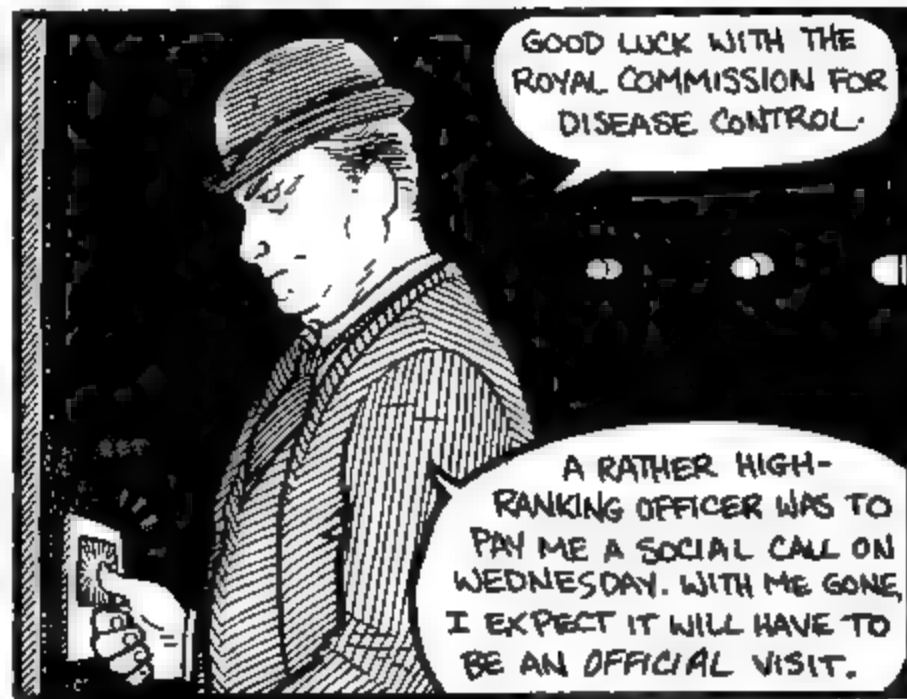
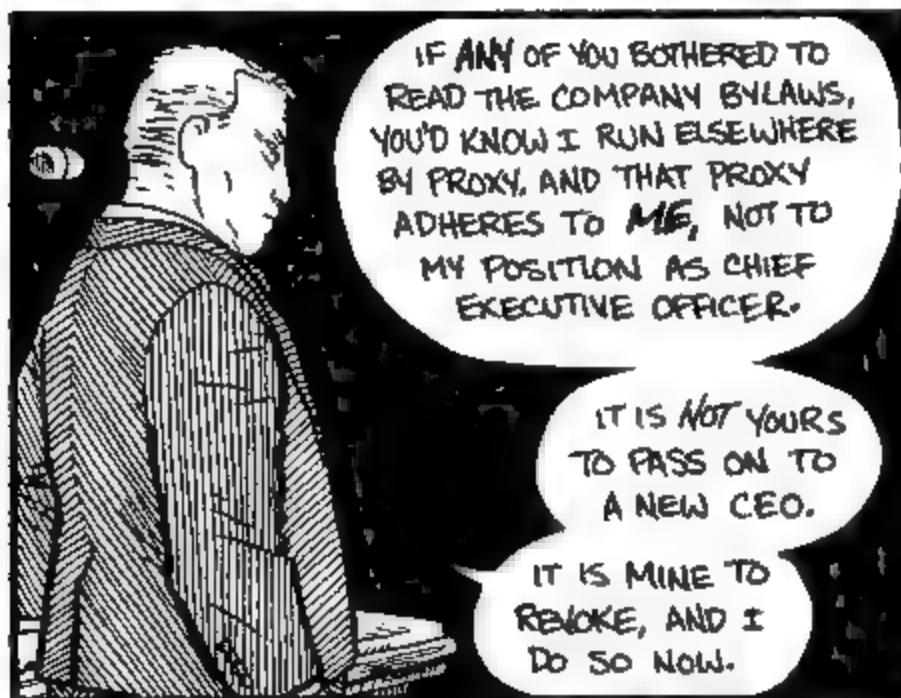
EVERY DIRECTION HE
HAS TAKEN, EVERYTHING AT
WHICH HE'S AIMED THE CONSIDERABLE
FORTUNES OF THIS COMPANY.
YOUR DECISIONS.



YOU WHO HAVE
RUN OUR STOCK INTO
THE GROUND.

YOU WHO HAVE
COMPLETELY LOST
CONTROL OF HIM.









YOU! YOU'RE BORING!
YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOOD
ENOUGH FOR A
GOOD INSULT!



YOU'RE IN THE ONE PLACE
WHERE MAGIC IS ALWAYS
REAL! PART THE SEAS
IF YOU WANT!

RAIN DOWN
INK AND BLOOD!

TRANSFORM!
FLY!



WHAT?
WHAT??
WHAT DO I
GIVE?



YOU'VE GOT STORIES
IN THERE, I KNOW. I
CAN SMELL 'EM--

STOPPIT, STOPPIT!
I DON'T! I CAN'T
TELL A STORY TO
SAVE MY LIFE!



FUNNY YOU
SHOULD PUT
IT THAT WAY.



NOW-- MOST OF THOSE PEOPLE ARE FINE NOW. FOR THEM, IT WAS JUST A MOMENTARY THING --THE NEUROLOGICAL EQUIVALENT OF AN ICE-CREAM HEADACHE.

BUT SOME PEOPLE JUST DON'T SEEM TO GET OVER IT, AND YOU'RE ONE OF THEM.

NO, FOR GOD'S SAKE, DON'T UNPLUG HIM--

...HILL STRIKE...
...HILL STRIKE...
...HILL STRIKE...

MAYBE YOU'RE STILL AT YOUR DESK, ALL HOOKED UP, DROOLING AWAY, EH?

MAYBE YOU'RE IN A HOSPITAL, WITH A BUNCH OF DOCTORS TRYING TO COME UP WITH FANCY WAYS TO SAY WHY THE HELL YOU WON'T WAKE UP.

MAYBE YOU'LL BE THERE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

OR MAYBE YOU'RE IN A NUT HOUSE ALREADY. A NICE GARDEN WARD, WHERE THEY KEEP THE VEGETABLES?

Y'KNOW, CHARITY PATIENTS HAVE NO RIGHTS? THEY CAN DO ANYTHING THEY WANT WITH YOU.

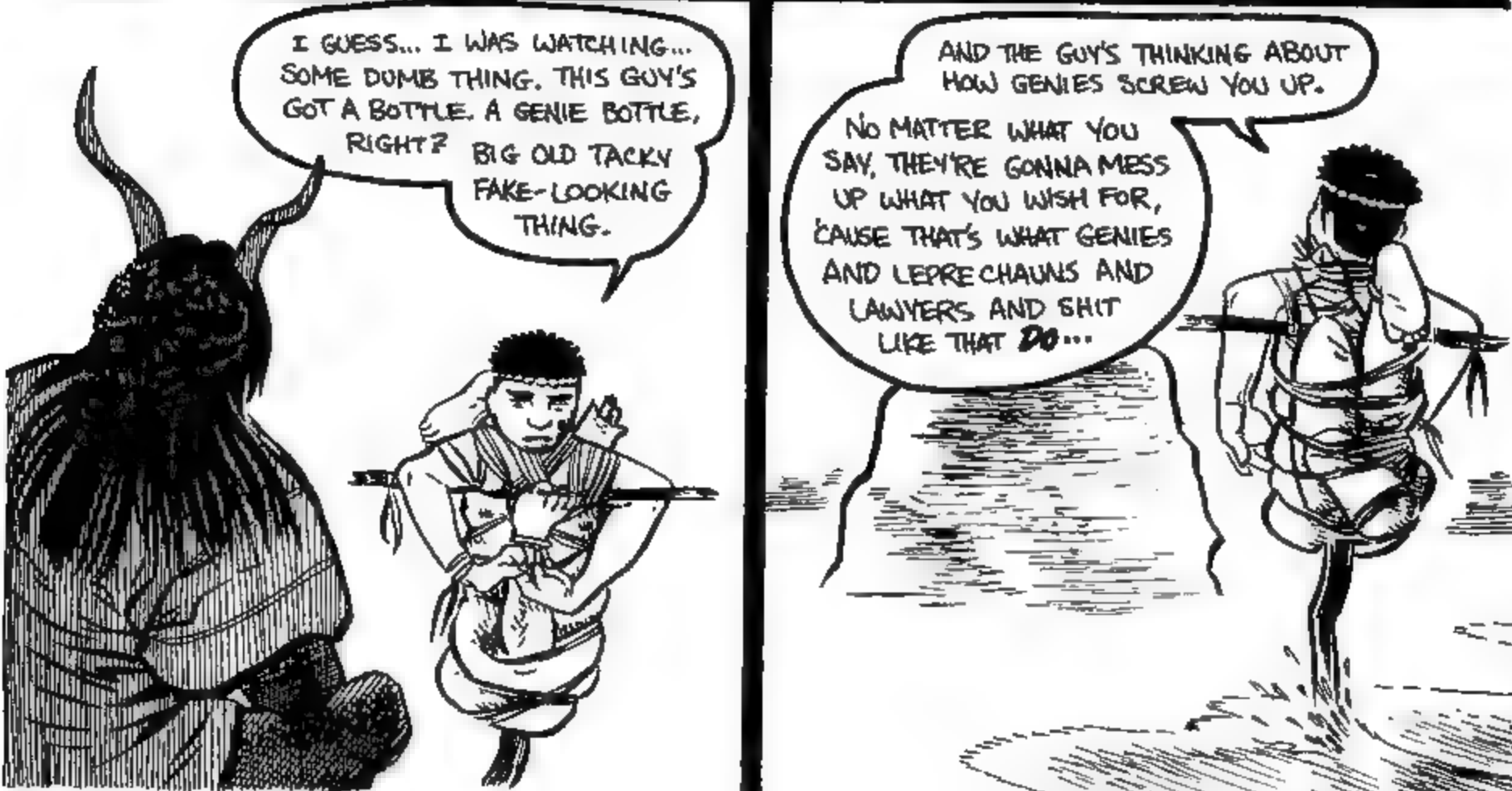
IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE, ANYWAY.

...HILL STRIKE...
...HILL STRIKE...

--WHAT'S THAT?

"NO"?
"NOT ME"?

TOLD YOU YOU WOULDN'T LIKE MY STORY.



HE GETS IT FROM SOME SKEEVY
OLD GUY IN A FUNKY OL' SHOP, Y'KNOW,
LIKE NOTHING YOU GET FROM A GUY
LIKE THAT CAN BE **GOOD--**

UH--

DON'T WORRY
ABOUT THAT.
KEEP GOING.

UH, SO, SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT
HAPPENED NEXT, 'CAUSE IT WAS STUPID
AND I SORTA ZONED OUT RIGHT THEN,
BUT I THOUGHT, Y'KNOW, WHAT IF--



--WHAT IF, JUST AS HE
POPS THE CORK, HE BRINGS
THE BOTTLE UP TO HIS MOUTH
REAL FAST, AND-- AND--



-- LIKE, DRINKS
THE GENIE??



'CAUSE THEN,
WOULDN'T THAT
MEAN HE



2-SIGH:

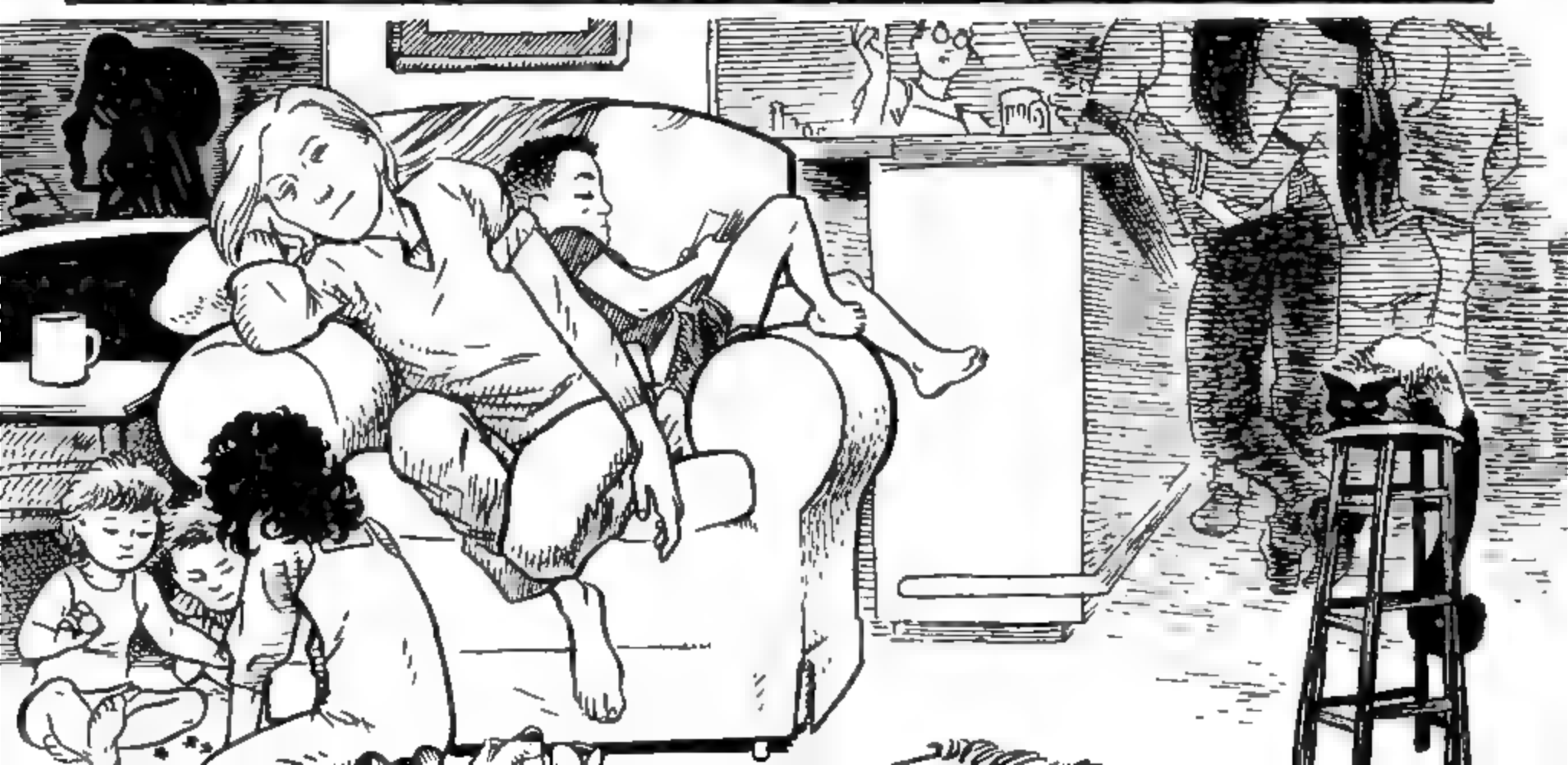
FINE LEAVE
ME HANGING.

HOPES YOU FINISH
THAT SOMEDAY, YOU
SELFISH LITTLE SHIT.



EVERYBODY,
EVERY DAY, HAS GOT
ENOUGH IDEAS TO
KEEP **ANY** WRITER
BUSY ALL HIS
LIFE...

EVERY
BUTT ON A
BARSTOOL,
EVERY
NIGHT..





EVERYWHERE
WAS NEVER
AS BIG AS
IT FELT.

A WHOLE WORLD
CONTAINED ENTIRE
IN THE FEW POUNDS
OF GREASE AND
CHEMICALS THAT
ARE MY BRAIN?

NOT
POSSIBLE.



IT NEVER
FELT LIKE IT
WAS THE SIZE
OF A WHOLE
WORLD.

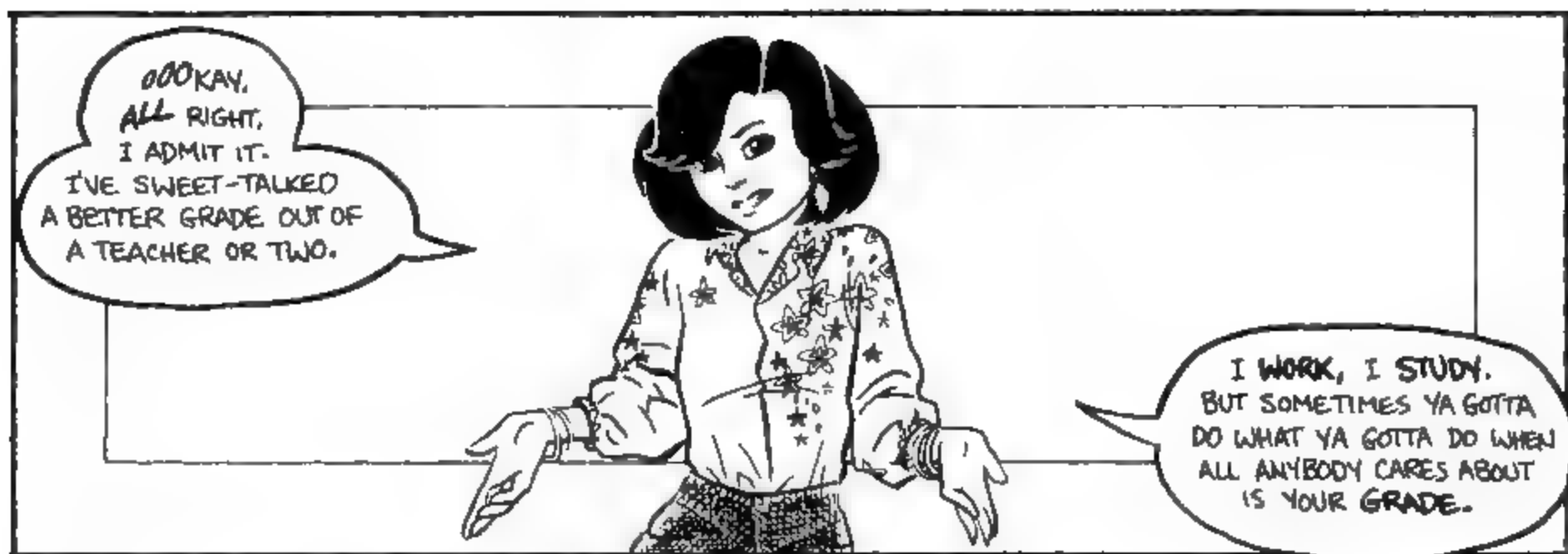
NO.
IT NEVER
FELT THAT
SMALL.

MYSTERY DATE



·part one·





ASSISTANT PROFESSOR A. A. ZIVANCEVIC, HERE ON SANCTUARY FROM THE CITY OF JAVECEK, PHD SEVERAL TIMES OVER--
XENOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY, PALEOZOOLOGY.

I DUNNO WHAT THE TWO A'S STAND FOR.

NOR DO I KNOW HOW HE LOST HIS LEGS OR WHY HE CHOSE TO WEAR PROSTHETIC ONES DESIGNED FOR A LAESKE.

I DUNNO WHY HE'S AN EXILE.

I DON'T KNOW WHY HE'S BLIND. I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF HE IS-- HE SURE DOESN'T ACT LIKE IT.

I MEAN I'VE KNOWN BLIND PEOPLE AND HE DOESN'T USE ANY OF THE TRICKS THEY USE TO DO THINGS OR GET AROUND.

SO MAYBE THE BANDANNA'S A FASHION STATEMENT.

OR A POLITICAL ONE. I DUNNO.

ZIV-AN-CHIV-IC. IT DOES SORT OF ROLL OFF THE TONGUE.

WHAT I DO KNOW ABOUT HIM IS LIMITED TO HIS REPUTATION AS A SCIENTIST, WHICH IS MAJOR, SO OF COURSE HE'S NEVER IN CLASS, AND HIS TEMPER, WHICH IS ALSO MAJOR, SO USUALLY THAT'S NOT SUCH A BAD THING.

HIS HOME CITY-- JAVECEK-- HAS SOME PRETTY EXTREME IDEAS ABOUT HEALTH CARE AND GENETIC PURITY. FROM WHAT I HEAR, THEY THINK IF YOU GET SICK, YOU'RE FLAWED, AND YOU'RE A DANGER TO THE GENE POOL.

...MAYBE HE'S GOT SOME FUNKY DISEASE.

HEXOHOL SHAR, Ph D
A.A. ZIVANCEVIC Ph D

SO IT WAS WITH THESE CHEERY THOUGHTS THAT I CONTEMPLATED MY SHITTY GRADE AND TRUDGED UP TO HIS OFFICE IN A SHORT SKIRT.

I CALL IT THE "CRYSTAL BALL" MOMENT: THE LOOK A GUY GETS ON HIS FACE WHEN HE REALIZES WHAT'S GOING ON-- IT TELLS YOU THE FUTURE.



0000



WELL. I MUST SAY, THIS IS AN UNWELCOME FIRST.



IT'S QUITE A TWIST TO ME, TOO-- USUALLY I'M SO DISTRACTED BY OTHER PEOPLE'S **INCESSANT** DREAMING ABOUT SEX THAT I'VE NEVER NOTICED ANYONE TRYING TO HAVE ACTUAL **PHYSICAL** SEX WITHOUT MUCH IN THE WAY OF **MENTAL** AROUSAL.



HOW DO YOU DO THAT, MY DEAR?

NO, DON'T ANSWER THAT.

YOUNG LADY, YOU ARE MAKING YOUR ATTEMPT BLUNDERED BY MISUNDERSTANDING. THE DEMANDS OF OUR FIELD-WORK HAVE KEPT US AWAY A GREAT DEAL THIS YEAR, AND A LOT OF CONFUSION HAS RESULTED CONCERNING **WHO** IS TEACHING **WHICH** CLASSES. THE SECTION IN WHICH YOU ARE PERFORMING SO DISMALLY IS ACTUALLY BEING TAUGHT BY MY COPROFESSOR, **HEXOHOLOI SHAR**.



AH, THERE YOU ARE, SHAR.

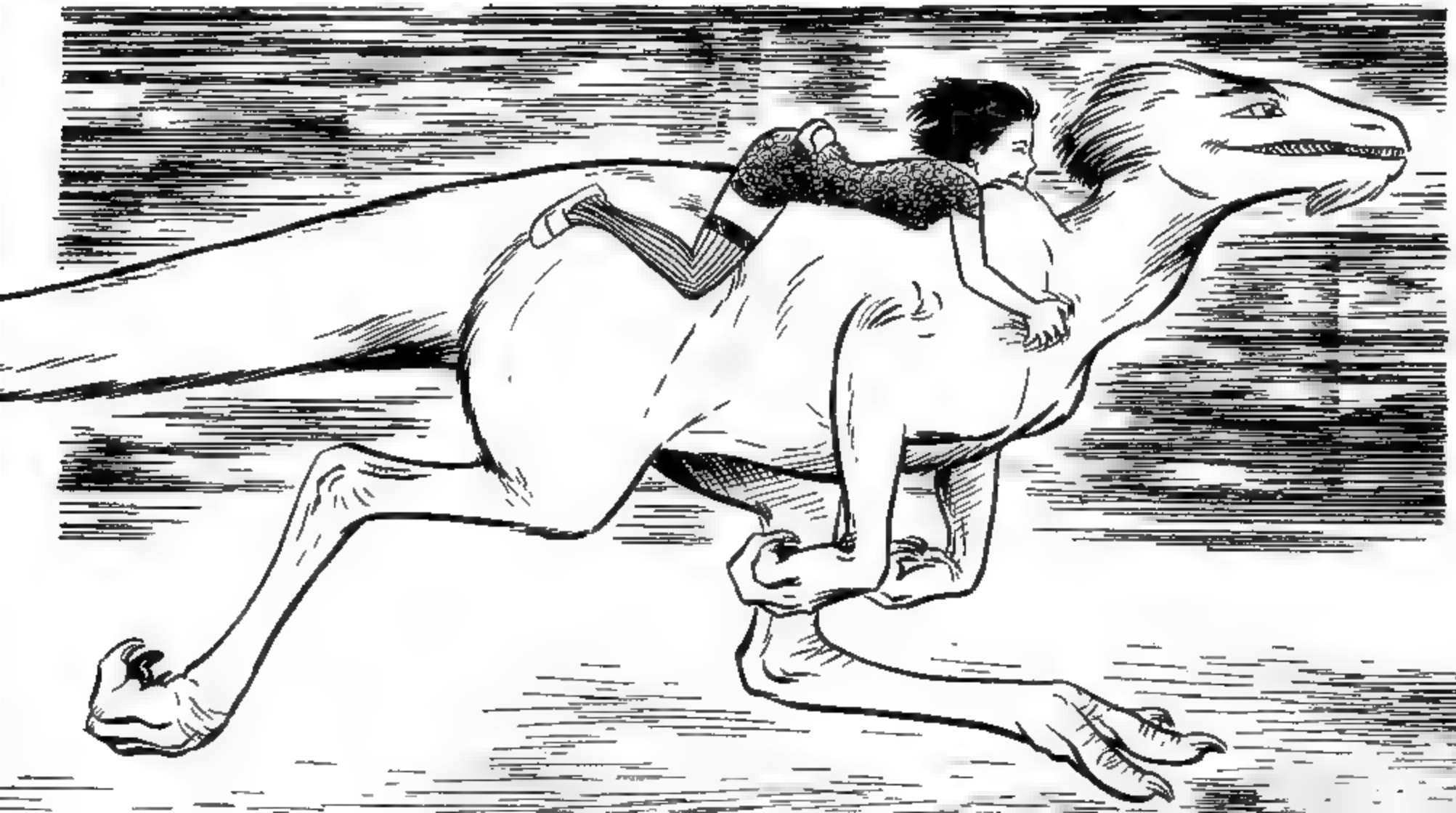


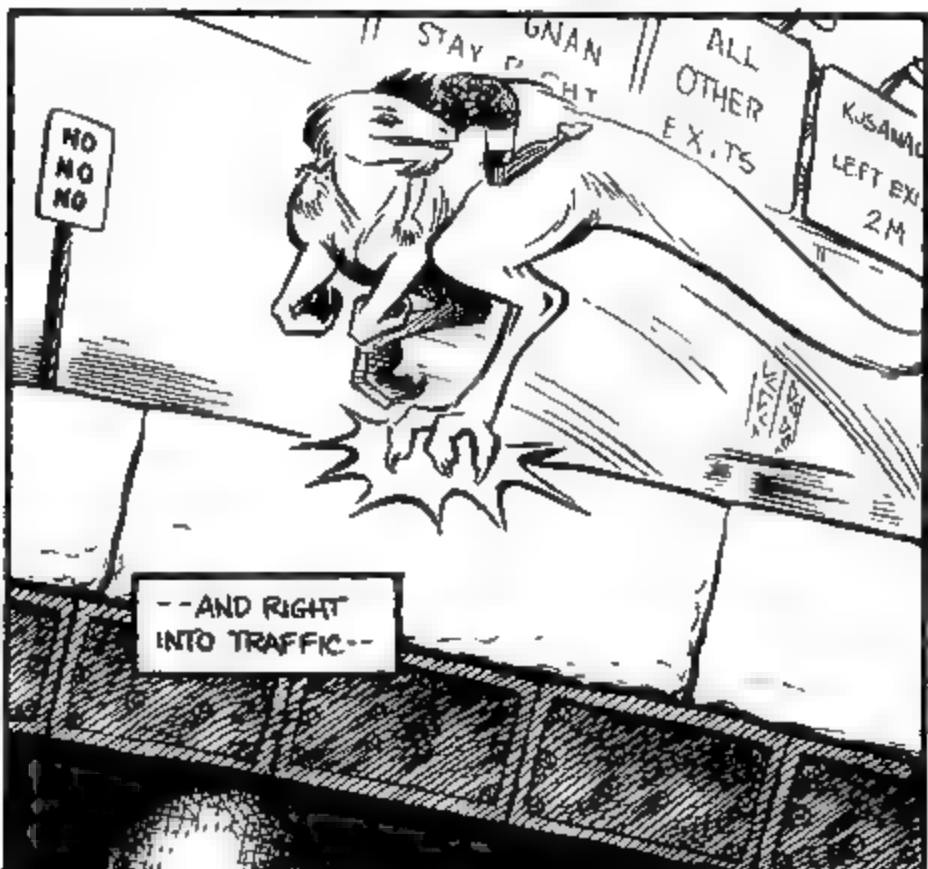
ONE OF YOUR ABANDONED STUDENTS HAS A PROPOSAL FOR YOU.

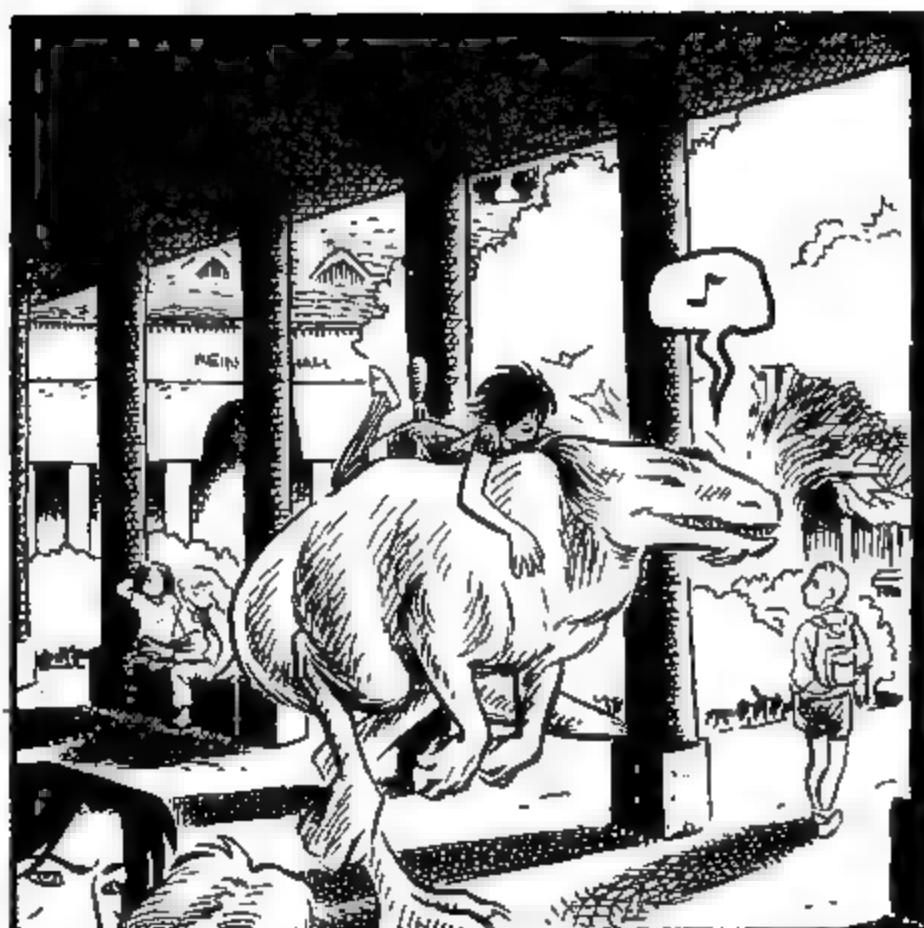


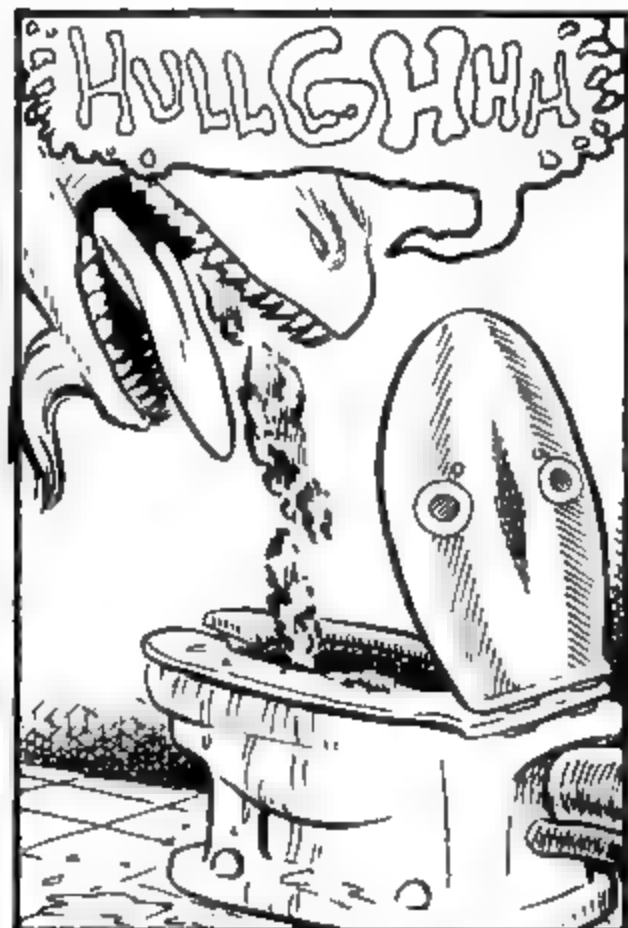
YERSS, MISS?











DR. ZEE!
DR. ZEE!

AM I TO
BE SPARED
NOTHING?



IT'S DR. SHAR,
SIR-- HE'S SICK--
HE'S THROWING
UP ALL OVER--

I'M SURE HE IS.
I THANK YOU ON HIS
BEHALF FOR SHOWING
HIM A GOOD TIME.



BUT HE BUT
HE -- I
DON'T UNDER-
STAND!

NO, I DARE
SAY YOU DON'T
GOOD DAY.



--BUT--

MISS
KRISHNA.



YOU ARE GETTING WHAT YOU
CAME FOR, AND HAVE HAD A
RARE EXPERIENCE AS WELL.
I DON'T SEE HOW YOU ARE
OWED AN EXPLANATION
TOO.



"THEY DERIVE INTENSE PLEASURE FROM RUNNING, FROM CARRYING HELPLESS YOUNG ON THEIR BACKS, FROM REGURGITATING INTO THE MOUTHS OF THEIR OFFSPRING."

"SINCE SHAR CAN'T REASONABLY EXPECT YOU TO DO THAT FOR HIM, HE DOES WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN."



LISTEN CLOSELY.

THE LAESKE ARE VERY DIFFERENT.

THEY ARE NOT HUMAN. THEY WERE NOT MADE BY HUMANS, AND THEY SHARE NO HUMAN GENES.

THE THINGS THAT GIVE THEM PHYSICAL PLEASURE ARE ALSO VERY DIFFERENT.



YOU'VE GIVEN HIM A GREAT DEAL OF ENJOYMENT AT VERY LITTLE COST TO YOURSELF, AND HE'LL NO DOUBT CHANGE YOUR GRADE.

SHAR IS LONELY, AND HE HAS NO FAITH IN THE GRADING SYSTEM.

PLEASE DON'T ADVERTISE THIS. HE'S IN ENOUGH PROFESSIONAL DISGRACE AS IT IS.



WHY DON'T YOU DO THIS FOR HIM?

I'M SURE YOU HAVE OTHER INSTRUCTORS TO ATTEND TO. GOOD DAY, MISS!



WHAT AN ALIEN TURN MY LIFE TOOK THAT DAY.

SLAM!



THEIR DOOR SLAMMED BEHIND ME AND I KNEW I WAS IN LOVE.

NOT WITH EITHER ONE ALONE; WITH BOTH.

OPEN THE DOOR, FOR YOUR

MYSTERY DATE



• variations. •

OH MY GOD.
YOU'RE NOT
SERIOUS.

WHAT'S THE MATTER?
AT LIAN-JIN YOU GET THE
NICEST PEOPLE
MONEY CAN BUY.

Lian-Jin
[TOMORROW'S
STARS
TODAY!]
Fin of the Institute
Art

BALLROOM
OPEN
24 HOURS

ART, MY ASS--
HOW THE HELL CAN
THEY CHARGE SO
MUCH? EVEN IF I
WAS GOING TO
PAY FOR SEX--

OLLIE

WELL, I WOULDN'T
PAY FOR THE MANGY
BREED OF HO YOU HANE
WHERE YOU GREW UP. NOT
LIKE THEY DON'T HAVE SAD
MATTRESSBACKS HERE. IF
YOU WANT CHEAP YOU
CAN GET CHEAP. THESE
PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT.

MY ASS.
IT'S STILL
JUST A
FUCK
CLUB.

ALL RIGHT,
ALL RIGHT; IF
YOU DON'T WANT
TO TRY ANYTHING
NEW FOR ME IT
-- -- --

ALL MY LIFE, ALL I
EVER WANTED TO BE
WAS A PROSTITUTE.

COME JOIN THE PARTY! DANCING DAILY
FORMAL ATTIRE REQUIRED FROM EIGHT TILL TWO
ADMISSION BEHIND PUBLIC ROOMS SUBJECT TO MANAGER'S APPROVAL



THEY WEREN'T **LIKE** ANYONE ELSE.
THEIR FACES WERE **EVERYWHERE**,
EVEN THE FUNNY-LOOKING ONES
WERE SO **BEAUTIFUL!**



AND THEY COULD DO **ANYTHING**.
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THEIR
GIFTS-- PAINTERS, DANCERS,
FIGHTERS-- I'D EVEN HEARD OF
ARTISTS WHO DID SCIENCE OR
OTHER ACADEMIC STUFF. OH,
THAT'S **STILL** SO FASCINATING--
NO, I MEAN THEY COULD **DO**
ANYTHING. THEY COULD COME
FROM ANYWHERE, NO TWO
STORIES WERE ALIKE--THEY
DID ALL THE THINGS YOU'D
NEVER THINK ANYBODY'D
EVEN DREAM OF DOING.
STAND UP, SPEAK UP,
DO!



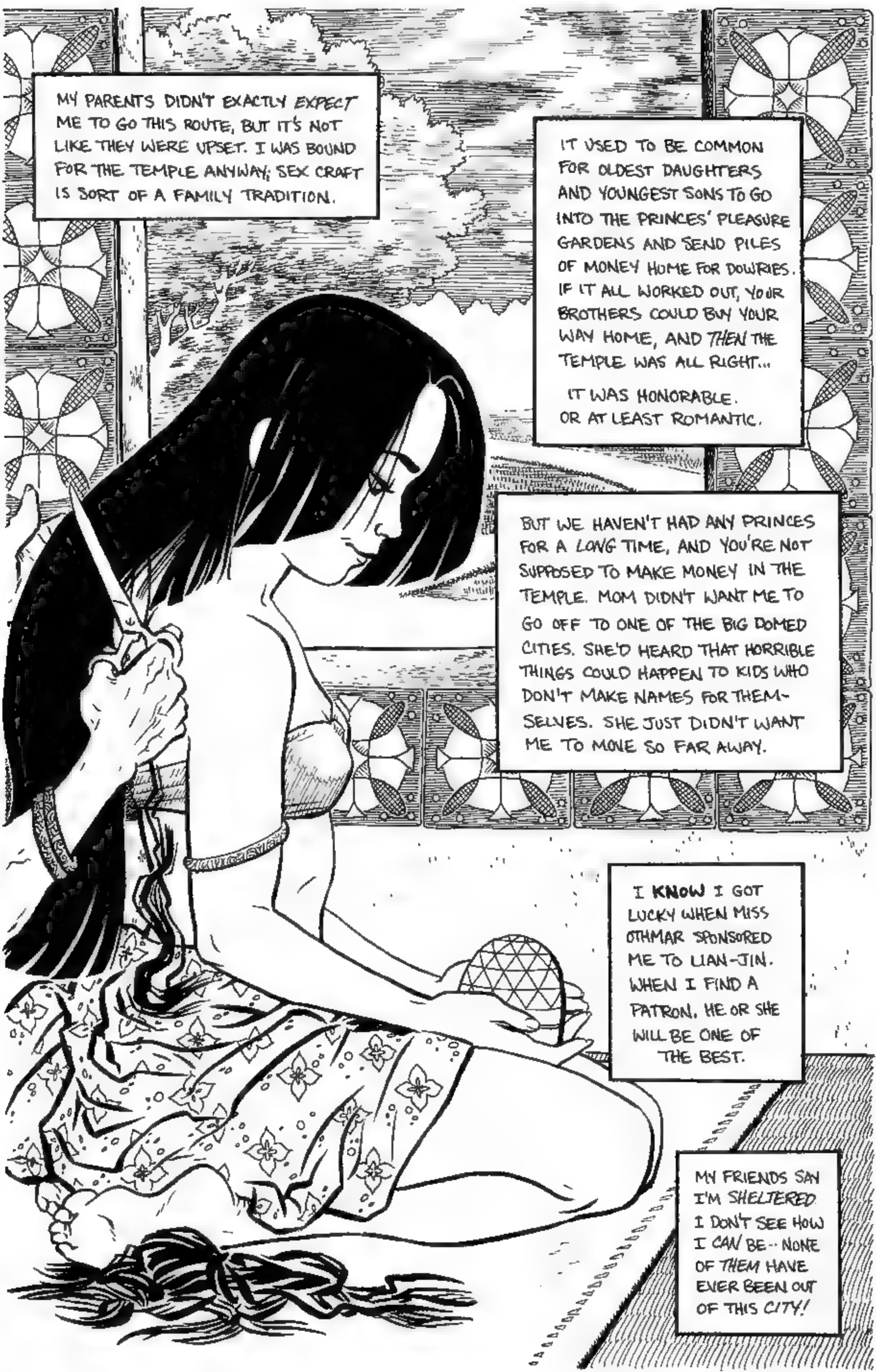
HOME WAS A SMALL PLACE, AND PRETTY REMOTE. JUST A WIDE SPOT WHERE TWO ROADS AND A RIVER COME TOGETHER. MY INSPIRATION WAS MISS OTHMAR, AN ARTIST WHO BUILT A BIG HOUSE NEAR MY TOWN (IF YOU WANT TO CALL IT A TOWN)...

WHEN I WAS TOLD SHE WAS FIFTY YEARS OLD, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!

EVEN OLD MR. SATYAJIT, WHO WAS THE OLDEST MAN IN TOWN, WAS ONLY FORTY!

MISS HENNA WAS RETIRED AND RICH ENOUGH TO BE A PRINCE HERSELF. SHE HAD ONLY TWO CLIENTS, BUT HEY, ONE WAS THE WAR KING OF REDMARK!

OF COURSE THE OTHER WAS OLD MR. SATYAJIT.
EW.



MY PARENTS DIDN'T EXACTLY EXPECT ME TO GO THIS ROUTE, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE THEY WERE UPSET. I WAS BOUND FOR THE TEMPLE ANYWAY; SEX CRAFT IS SORT OF A FAMILY TRADITION.

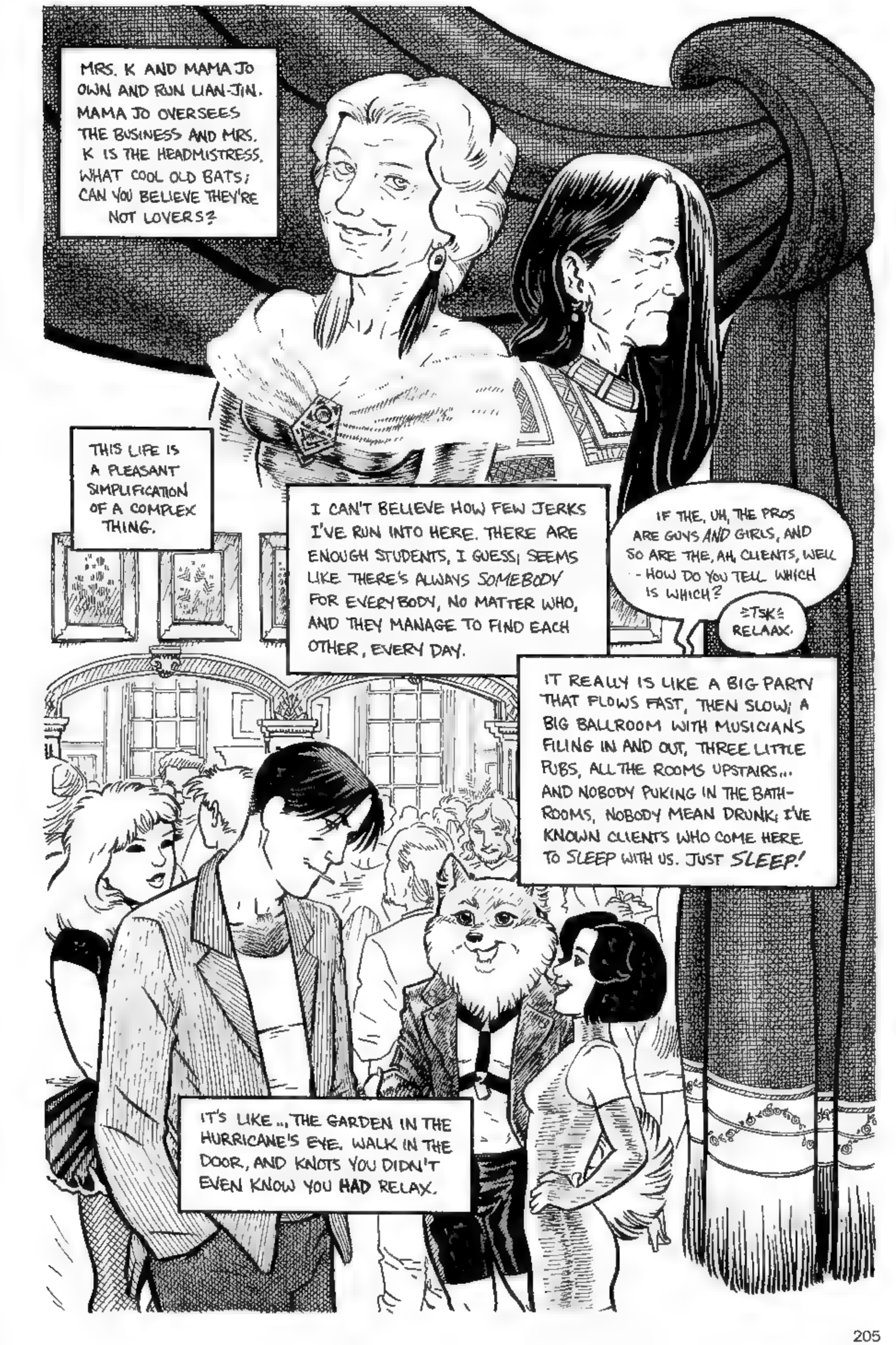
IT USED TO BE COMMON FOR OLDEST DAUGHTERS AND YOUNGEST SONS TO GO INTO THE PRINCES' PLEASURE GARDENS AND SEND PILES OF MONEY HOME FOR DOWRIES. IF IT ALL WORKED OUT, YOUR BROTHERS COULD BUY YOUR WAY HOME, AND THEN THE TEMPLE WAS ALL RIGHT...

IT WAS HONORABLE.
OR AT LEAST ROMANTIC.

BUT WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY PRINCES FOR A LONG TIME, AND YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO MAKE MONEY IN THE TEMPLE. MOM DIDN'T WANT ME TO GO OFF TO ONE OF THE BIG DOMED CITIES. SHE'D HEARD THAT HORRIBLE THINGS COULD HAPPEN TO KIDS WHO DON'T MAKE NAMES FOR THEMSELVES. SHE JUST DIDN'T WANT ME TO MOVE SO FAR AWAY.

I KNOW I GOT LUCKY WHEN MISS OTHMAR SPONSORED ME TO LIAN-JIN. WHEN I FIND A PATRON, HE OR SHE WILL BE ONE OF THE BEST.

MY FRIENDS SAY I'M SHELTERED. I DON'T SEE HOW I CAN BE... NONE OF THEM HAVE EVER BEEN OUT OF THIS CITY!



MRS. K AND MAMA JO
OWN AND RUN LIAN-JIN.
MAMA JO OVERSEES
THE BUSINESS AND MRS.
K IS THE HEADMISTRESS.
WHAT COOL OLD BATS;
CAN YOU BELIEVE THEY'RE
NOT LOVERS?

THIS LIFE IS
A PLEASANT
SIMPLIFICATION
OF A COMPLEX
THING.


I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW FEW JERKS
I'VE RUN INTO HERE. THERE ARE
ENOUGH STUDENTS, I GUESS, SEEMS
LIKE THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEBODY
FOR EVERYBODY, NO MATTER WHO,
AND THEY MANAGE TO FIND EACH
OTHER, EVERY DAY.

IF THE, UH, THE PROS
ARE GUYS AND GIRLS, AND
SO ARE THE, AH, CLIENTS, WELL
- HOW DO YOU TELL WHICH
IS WHICH?

ETSKE
RELAAX.

IT REALLY IS LIKE A BIG PARTY
THAT FLOWS FAST, THEN SLOW; A
BIG BALLROOM WITH MUSICIANS
FILING IN AND OUT, THREE LITTLE
PUBS, ALL THE ROOMS UPSTAIRS...
AND NOBODY PUKING IN THE BATH-
ROOMS, NOBODY MEAN DRUNK; I'VE
KNOWN CLIENTS WHO COME HERE
TO SLEEP WITH US. JUST *SLEEP!*

IT'S LIKE ... THE GARDEN IN THE
HURRICANE'S EYE. WALK IN THE
DOOR, AND KNOTS YOU DIDN'T
EVEN KNOW YOU HAD RELAX.



ONCE MAMA JO SHOWED
ME AN IMMENSE MACHINE
IN THE BASEMENT--

--WELL, NOT EXACTLY THE
BASEMENT, WE DON'T HAVE
A BASEMENT EXACTLY, BUT
UNDERNEATH, CERTAINLY,
UNDERNEATH EVERYTHING--

IT WAS HOOKED INTO
THE HEAT, THE AIR,
THE ELECTRICITY,
THE WATER--

MAMA JO TALKS IN A
LOW MUTTER; SHE HASN'T
GOT MANY TEETH AND SHE
SHUTS UP IF YOU ASK HER
TO REPEAT HERSELF--

SHE WAS TELLING ME--
SHE WAS TELLING ME
THAT IT CAN'T ACTUALLY
CHANGE PEOPLE-- IF
THE CROWD IS HAPPY,
IT WON'T GO SOUR.
NO FIGHTS, NO BARFING.

AND SHE STOOD THERE
EXPECTING ME TO SEE
THE FLIP SIDE OF IT, AND
I DIDN'T, BUT IT SEEMED
REALLY IMPORTANT THAT
I NEEDED TO KNOW AND
THAT I SHOULD LET IT GO
ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

REALLY, REALLY IMPORTANT.

I GUESS THAT
COULD HAVE BEEN
A **DREAM**, THOUGH,
'CAUSE I NEVER
FOUND THAT ROOM
AGAIN AND I **SURE**
WASN'T GONNA ASK
MAMA JO ABOUT IT.



SO. I
LOVE
MY JOB.

I LOVE MOST
OF MY REGULAR
CLASSES AT THE
UNIVERSITY.

I'VE GOT GOOD FRIENDS AND A GOOD
ROOMMATE AND A GOOD CHANCE AT A
CAREER. I'VE EVEN SORT OF GOTTEN
OVER THIS IDEA I HAD THAT EVERY-
BODY IN THE CITY WOULD BE AS WISE
AND OLD AS CHARICA TREES.

I LOVE TWO WONDERFUL
MEN, WHETHER OR NOT
THEY LOVE ME.

XENOLOGY

ANCEVIR, P.D.
SHAR, P.D.

BUT MRS. K STILL HASN'T AWARDED
ME MY DEGREE, AND I THINK I SEE
WHY. I AM SUCH AN IDIOT. I DON'T
HAVE AN OLD MR. SATYAJIT.

ALL THE TRULY GREAT ARTISTS ARE HEALERS.
IT'S THE SOUL AND SUBSTANCE OF THE ART.
WITHOUT IT, WE'RE JUST PLAYTHINGS, PARTY
FAVORS, OR WORSE.

Doc?

GO
AWAY.

BUT IT'S HARDLY
MY SALVATION
THAT MATTERS.
IT'S HIS.



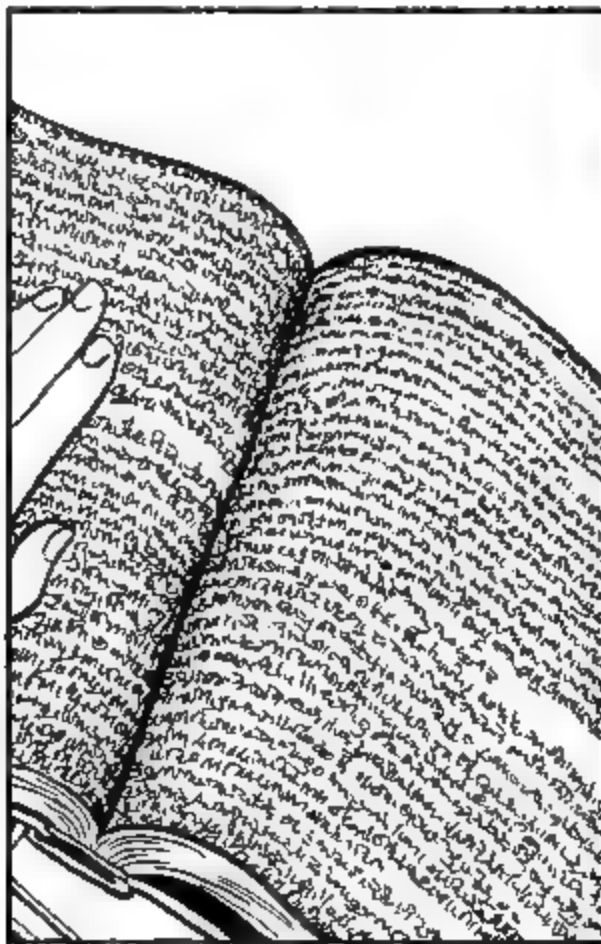
I REFUSE TO PONDER WHAT TWO QUARTERS UNDER THE HEAVY HAND OF MY REVERED COLLEAGUE DR. TORVALDSSSEN HAS WROUGHT. SO WITHOUT FURTHER ADD, LET US APPRAISE THE DAMAGE.

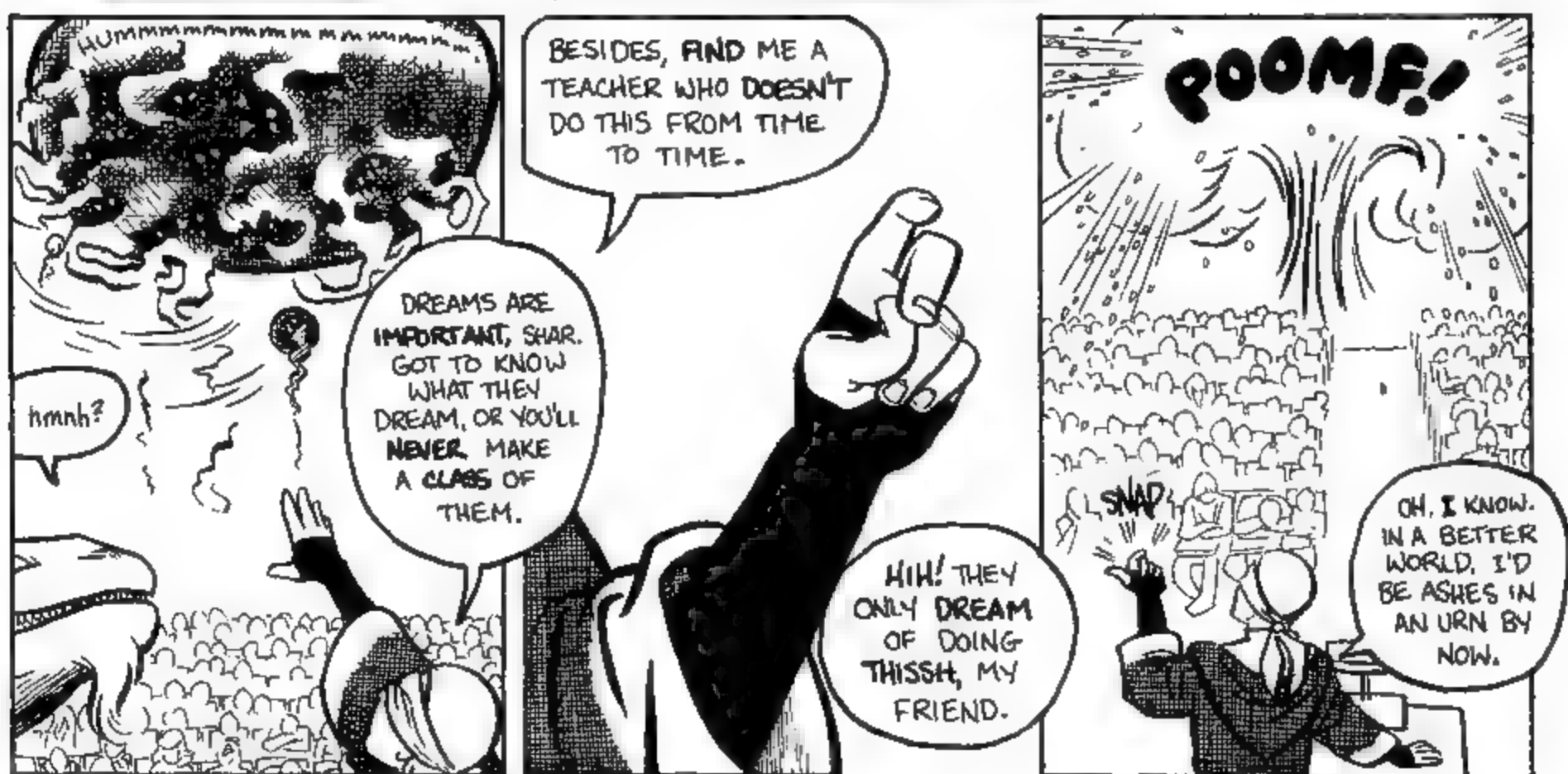
TEST ON THE FIRST DAY...

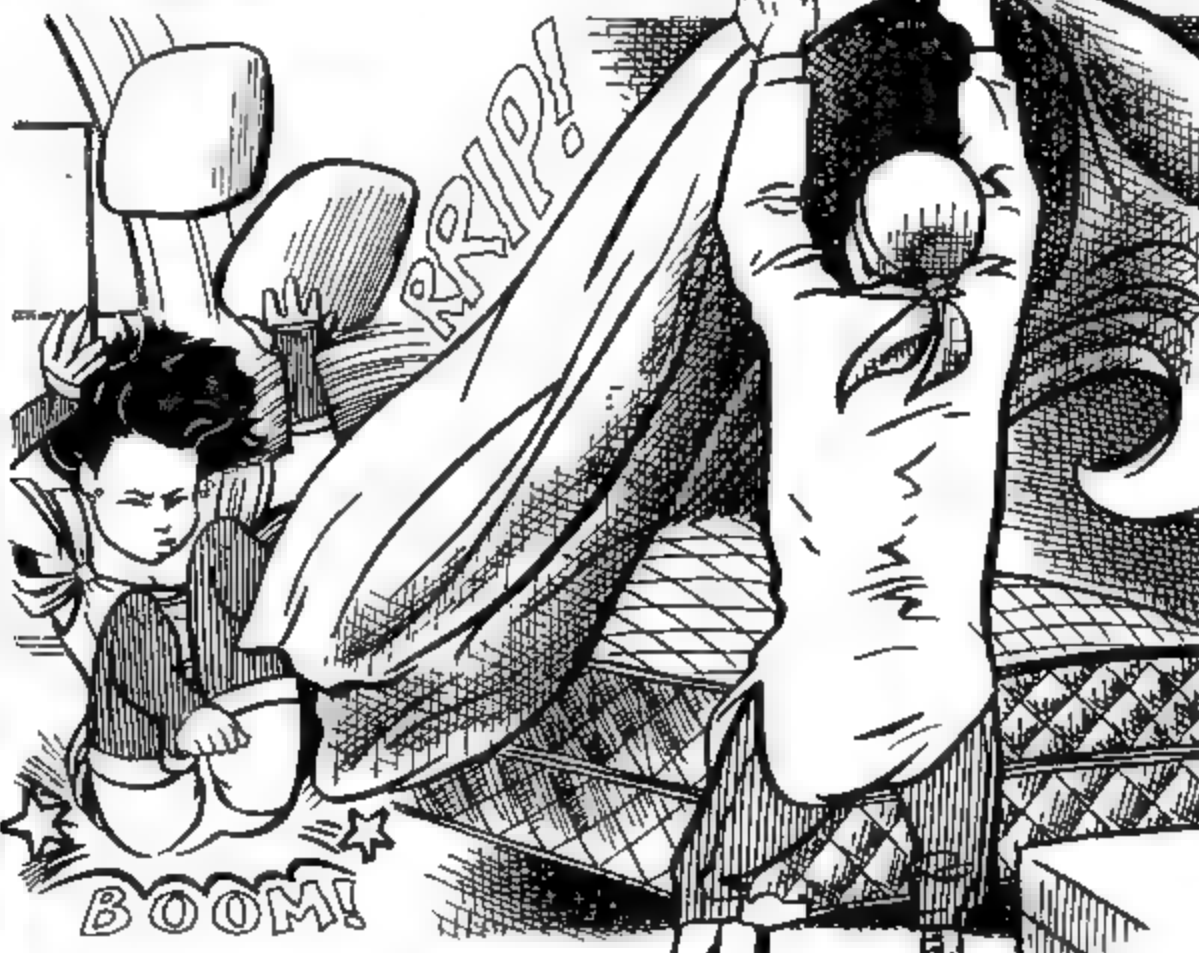
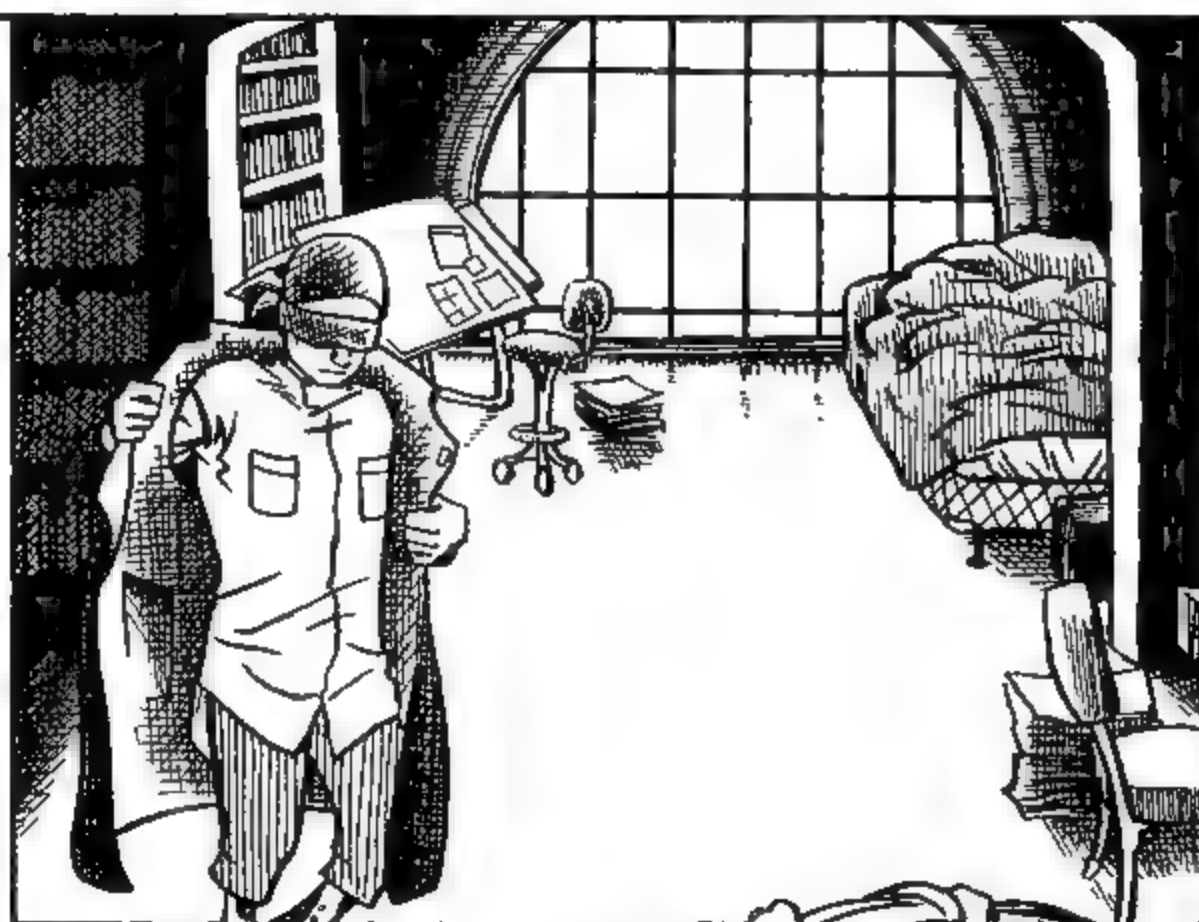
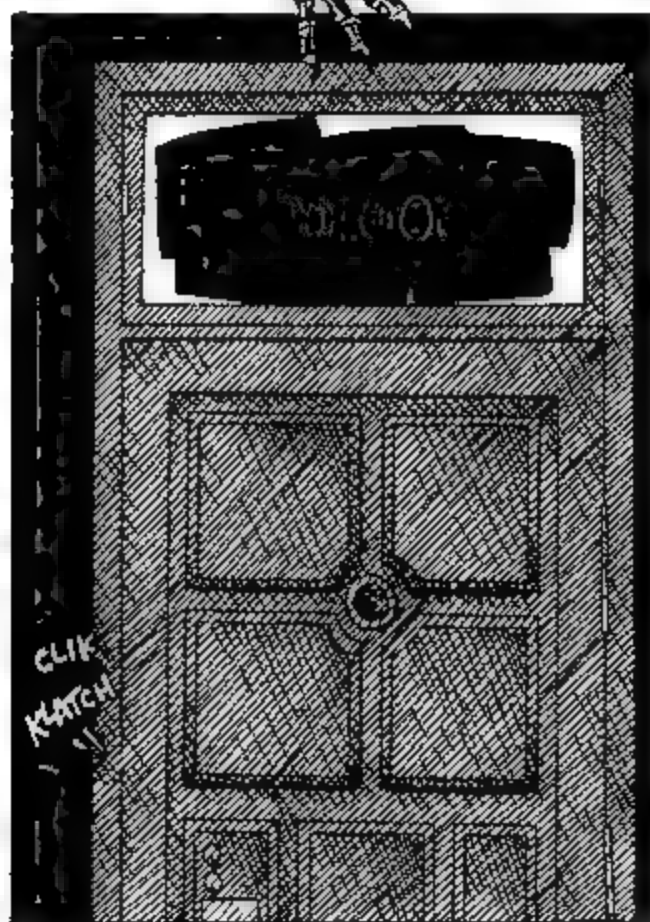
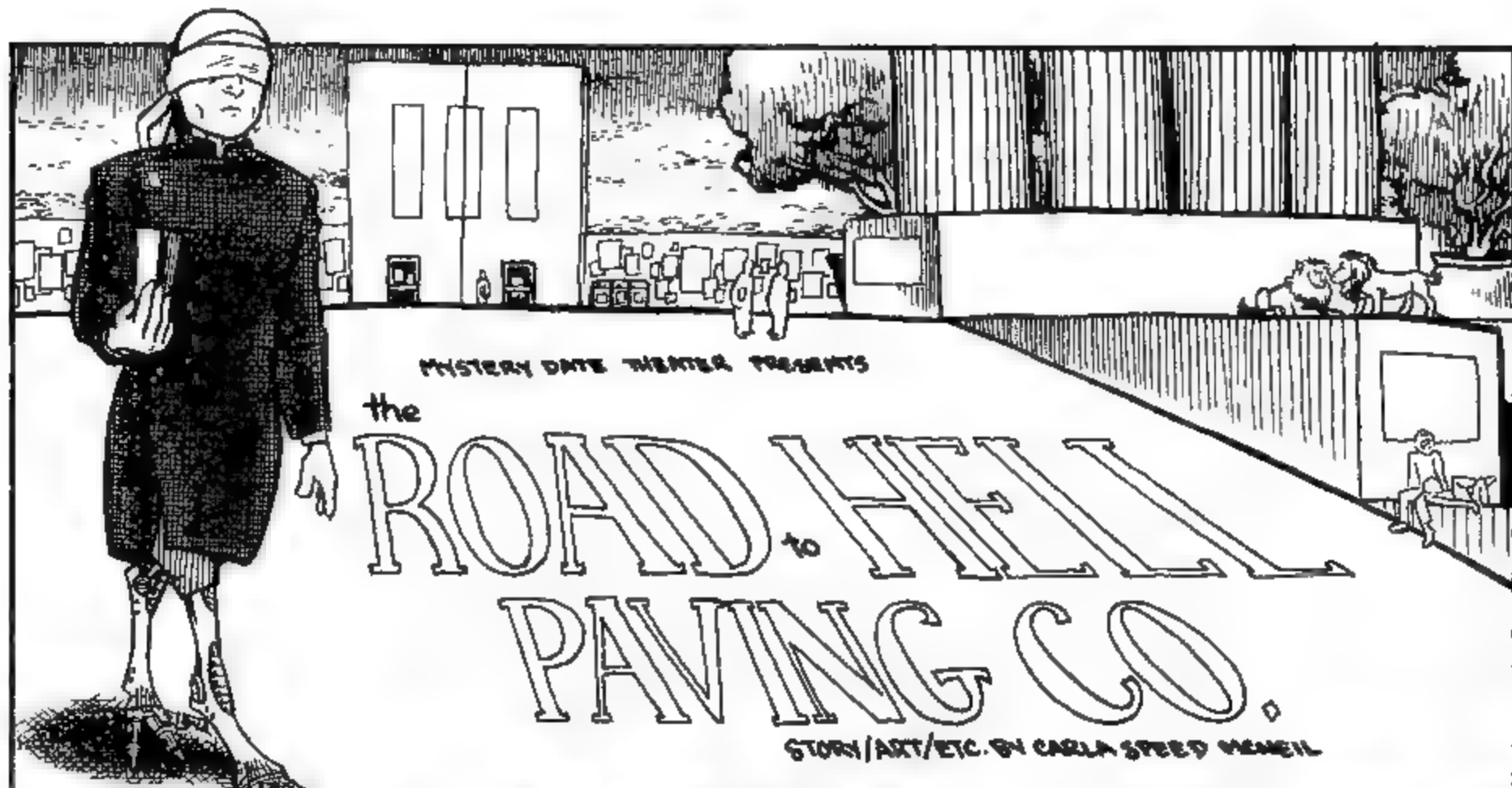
TYPICAL.

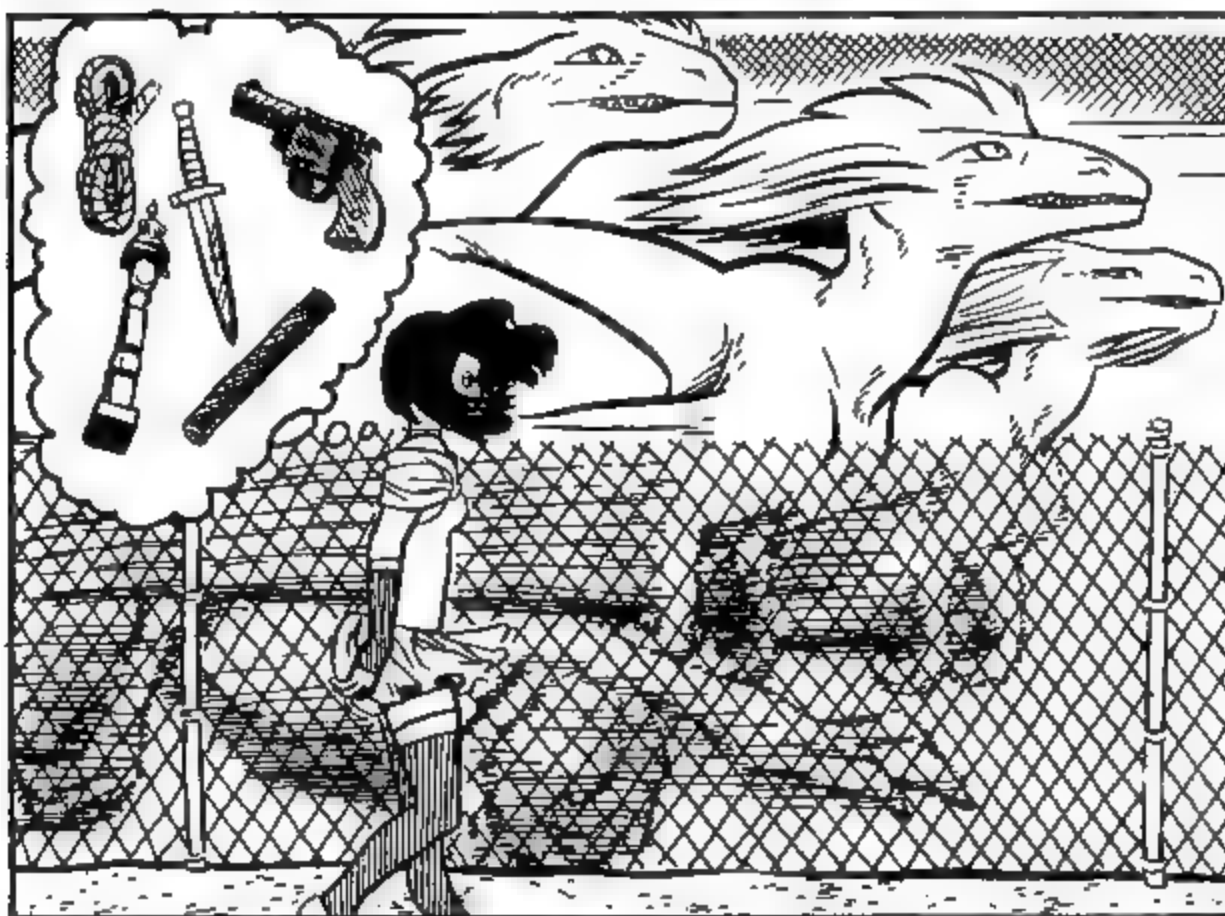
HEY! WAKE UP!



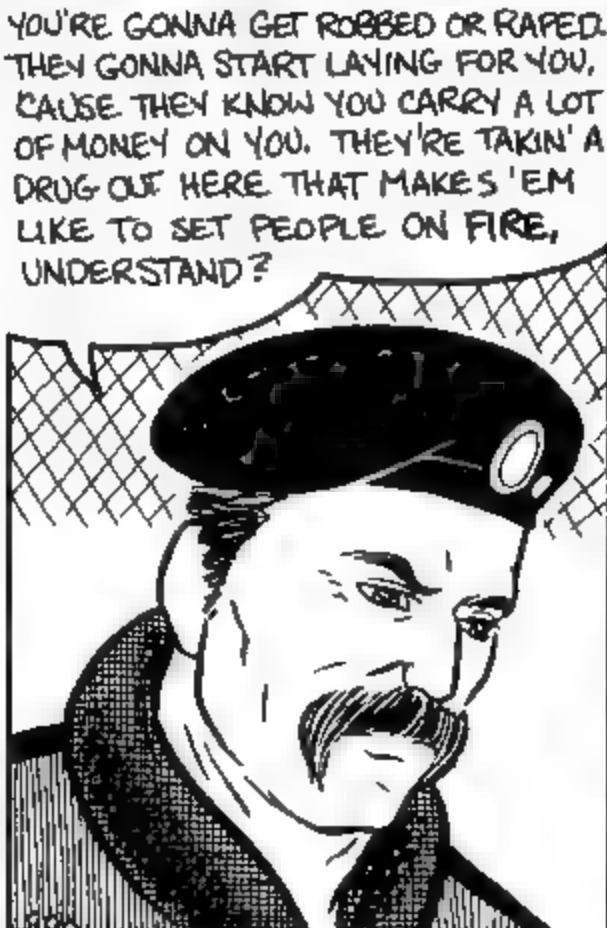


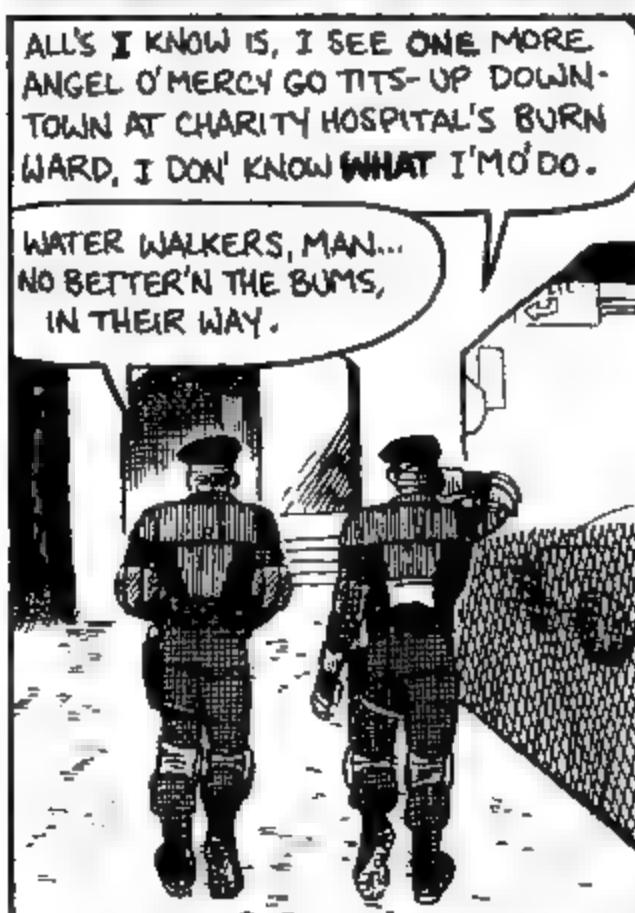
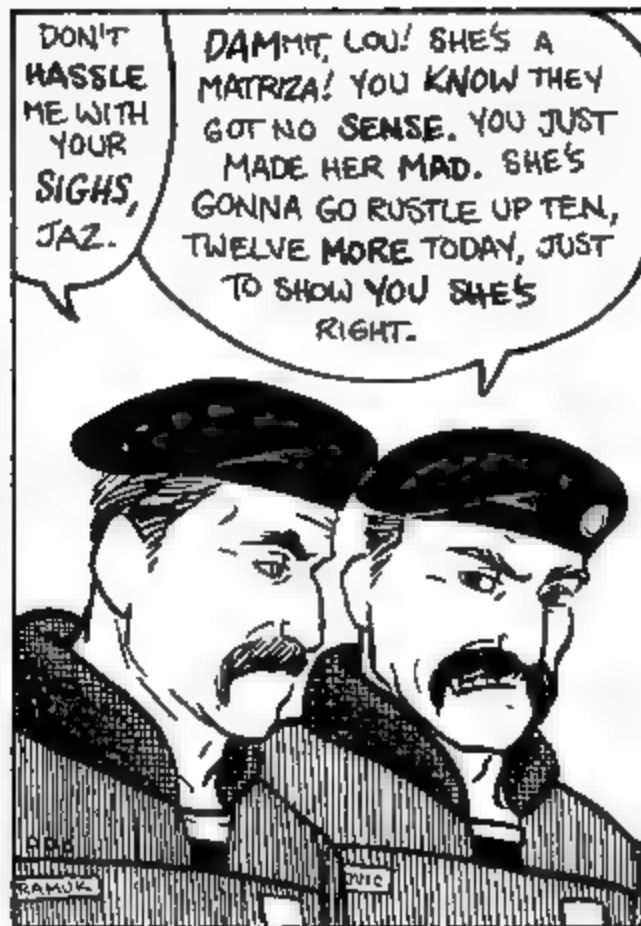






HECHI-AH=UNCLE (HONORIFIC)





MATRIZA-MUH-TRIZ-ZA = DO-GOODER





IT'S THE THEME FROM "JAWS", dum-dum



DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE I SLEPT IN, YOU ENDORPHIN JUNKIE? I DON'T EVEN HAVE ANY CLASSES TODAY.

TODAY, I AM GONNA STAY IN BED AND READ.



I'VE GOT SOMETHING YOU CAN READ, BABY.

OH, I'LL BET YOU HAVE, YOU AMBULATORY TONGUE--
--HUH?



CONGRATULATIONS, PET. MAMA JO HASN'T TAUGHT THAT CLASS ON IMPOTENCE THERAPY IN ABOUT TWELVE YEARS.

OH M-I-GAHH...





VARY, THIS IS YOUR FAVORITE INSTRUCTOR SPEAKING... HAVE YOU EVER HAD A BOYFRIEND?



OR A GIRL-FRIEND?

huh? SURE.

WHEN?

OH, I GUESS I WAS MAYBE EIGHT... Y'KNOW, BEFORE.

WHY?



YOU'RE HAPPY ENOUGH TO SEE THEM HERE, IN THE HOUSE, BUT NEVER OUTSIDE.

HOW COME?



OLLIE, IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT!

VARY, YOU'RE NOT A SLAVE!



YOU'RE NOT A CONCUBINE, EITHER, NO MATTER HOW YOU WERE TRAINED AS A KID. HELL, YOU'RE NOT EVEN A SERVING GIRL! YOU CAN DO AS YOU LIKE!

BUT I AM, OLLIE...



I'M JUST PURSUING A SIMPLE LIFE... MAYBE IN VAIN, I DON'T KNOW. BUT THE CLIENTS ARE NICE FOLKS. I GOT YOU AND BAX TO SNUGGLE WITH AND TALK TO. I'M LEARNING AN ART THAT BENEFITS THE SUFFERING AND ENRICHES THE HEALTHY... MY WORK IS MY DREAM JOB.

WHAT MORE SHOULD I THINK I'M ENTITLED TO?



LOVE.

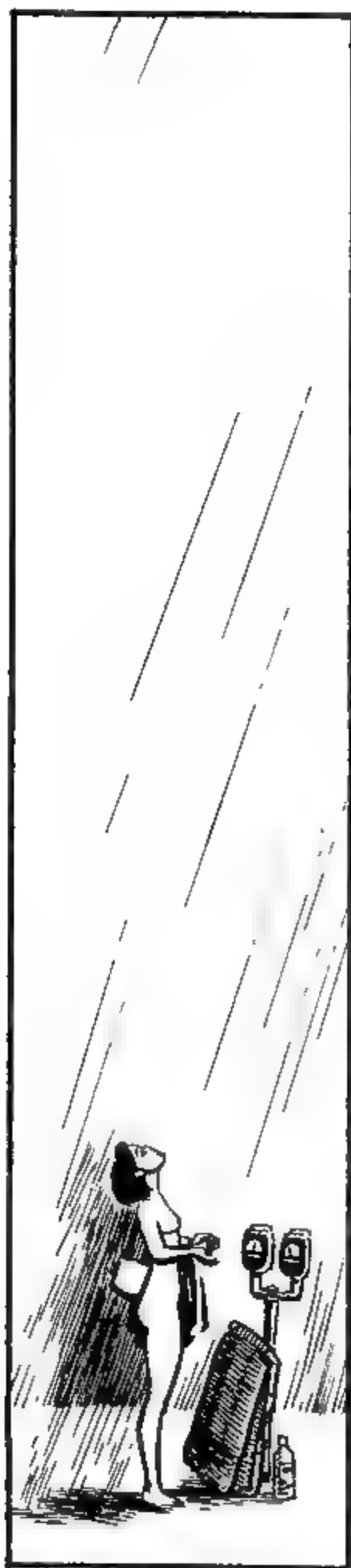
"OH MAIDEN, DO BUT REMEMBER THAT I SUFFERED SUCH PAIN FOR LOVE OF THEE."

ROMANTIC LOVE MUST HAVE BEEN INVENTED BY THE DANGEROUSLY INSANE.



FINI
CSM
98

.lux.



"REALLY, GIRL.
THIS ISN'T LIKE
YOU AT ALL.

"I DON'T MEAN
HAVING TWO
GUYS ON THE
STRINGER AT
ONCE. I DON'T
MEAN HAVING
A FIXATION
ON COOLER
MEN. I DON'T
EVEN MEAN
ONLY BEING
ATTRACTED
TO GUYS WHO
OBVIOUSLY
CAN NEVER
WORK OUT IN
ANY LONG-
TERM WAY...

TEMPLE

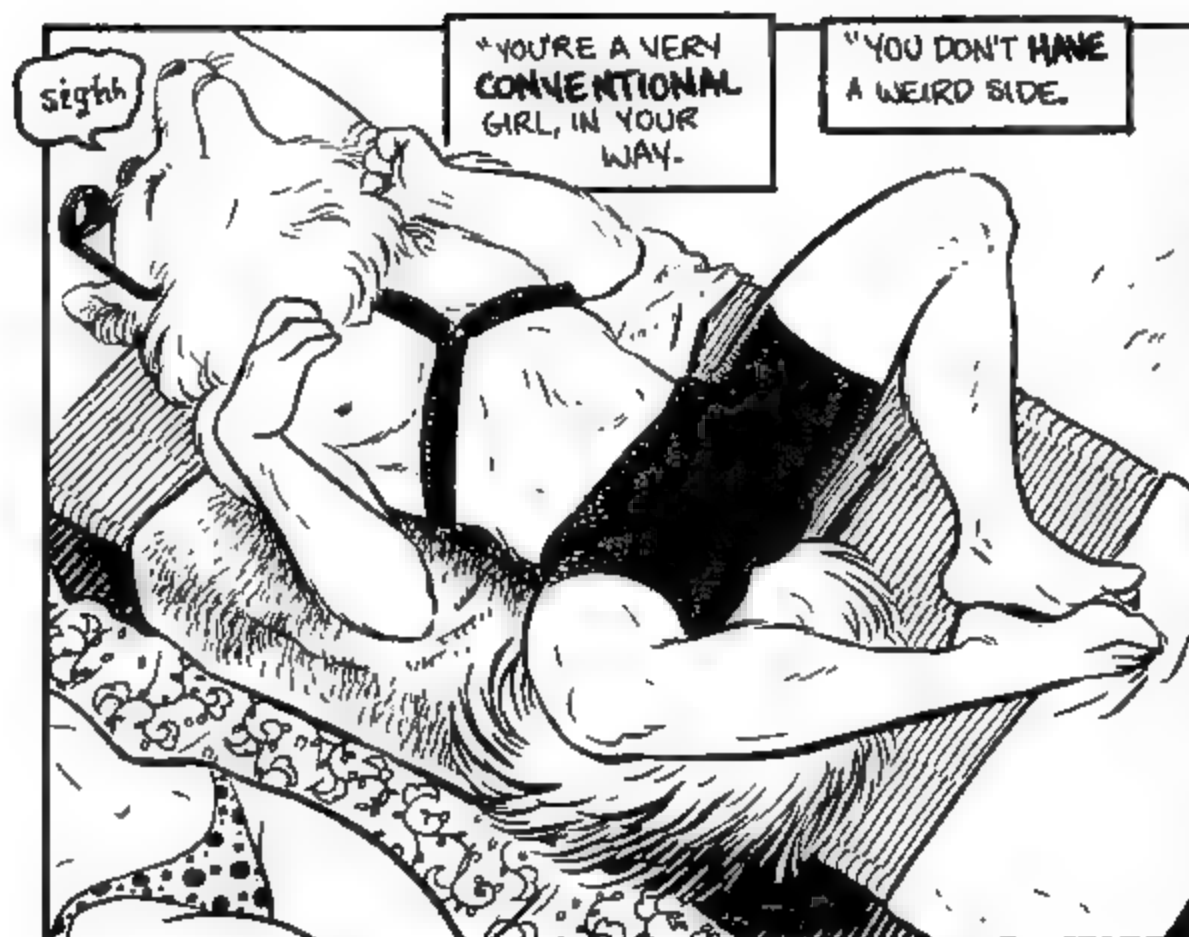
UNIVERSITY

IPISK

"IT'S THIS CHARITY-CASE
THING! YOU'VE NEVER
PLAYED SOCIAL WORKER!

"AND UP TILL NOW I
HAVE NEVER SEEN
YOU GET ALL GLASSY
EYED OVER ANY
SUCH BUM UNLESS
HE WAS BEAUTIFUL..

"SOME GUYS LAUGH A GIRL
INTO THE SACK; OTHERS WHINE
AND HOPE YOU'LL TAKE PITY ON
THEM. WHININ' NEVER WORKED
ON YOU! YOU'RE A LAUGHER;
I ALWAYS ADMIRER THAT
ABOUT YOU, BUT NOW...TSK!



Sigh

"YOU'RE A VERY CONVENTIONAL GIRL, IN YOUR WAY."

"YOU DON'T HAVE A WEIRD SIDE."



"ARE YOU BUYING INTO THAT 'UNDERSTANDING WOMAN' SHIT NOW?"

"THERE'RE OTHER WORDS FOR THAT WAY OF SELLING YOURSELF SHORT..."

MILWA, SHUT UP...

YOU'RE NOT... MY...



...MY BEST FRIEND...

...WAS THE MEANEST GIRL IN TOWN...

HERE COMES TOILET PAPER, WIPING UP THE REAR!

BUT I DIDN'T KNOW IT BECAUSE SHE WAS NEVER MEAN TO ME.



WHY ARE ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS THE FIRSTBORN? WHAT A HUSBAND I COULD CATCH FOR THIS ONE, WITH THESE GREAT COW'S EYES!

SHE'LL DO OUR TOWN PROUD AT THE TEMPLE.

PAHH! WASTED ON TEMPLE GIRLS. WHAT WILL DO HER PROUD THERE IS NOT IN HER FACE, TO BE SURE.

SHE WAS MY FRIEND.

SHE COULD MAKE ME LAUGH AT ANYTHING.

EVEN THE BLUE-RINSE MAFIA, THE OLD LADIES WHO RAN EVERYTHING.





SHE RULED THE ROOST, FOR SURE-- ALL THE GIRLS.

BUT IT SEEMED ONLY RIGHT; SHE ALWAYS HAD THE BEST IDEAS, THE BEST GAMES.

SHE COULD HAVE THEM ALL ROLLING WITH LAUGHTER OR REDUCED TO TEARS IN AN INSTANT, LIKE A ROLLER COASTER!



SHE CYCLED THE GIRLS IN AND OUT, ACCORDING TO HER WHIM.

ONE DAY A GIRL WOULD BE ON TOP OF THE WORLD BECAUSE SHE'D BEEN MADE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION-- BUT THE NEXT DAY...

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY STAYED AROUND. IT WAS ALL RIGHT FOR ME, CAUSE SHE NEVER GOT NASTY TO ME, BUT THEY-- WHY DID THEY TAKE SO MUCH CRAP OFF HER?

CRY, SITA, CRY!

WHY DIDN'T THEY JUST TELL HER TO TAKE A BIG FLYING LEAP?

CRY, SITA, CRY!

SHE SAID THEY WERE PATHETIC.



CRY, SITA, CRY!



WASN'T SHE... A LITTLE BIT... RIGHT?

CRY, SITA, CRY!



WHERE WAS IT



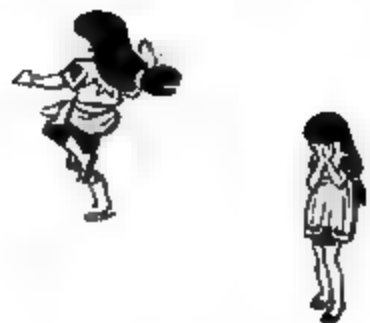
I HAD THIS IDEA THAT IF I DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM, I COULDN'T BE DOING ANY HARM.

NO REAL HARM.

AND SINCE I NEVER MEANT ANY HARM...

...SURELY...

...I...





I HAVE ANOTHER FRIEND NOW, WELL, SHE'S A TEACHER'S ASSISTANT REALLY.

MILYA.

SHE'S LOUD AND VULGAR AND FUNNY AND NEVER LETS A THOUGHT GO UNSPOKEN.

SHE'S VERY LOYAL AND PROTECTIVE OF ME -- THE BIG SISTER I NEVER HAD. OR WAS.

OH, I'M GETTING SUCH A HEADACHE... TURN THE MUSIC UP, BUDDY...

I LAUGH A LOT HARDER WHEN SHE'S AROUND; I'M AFRAID OF HER.

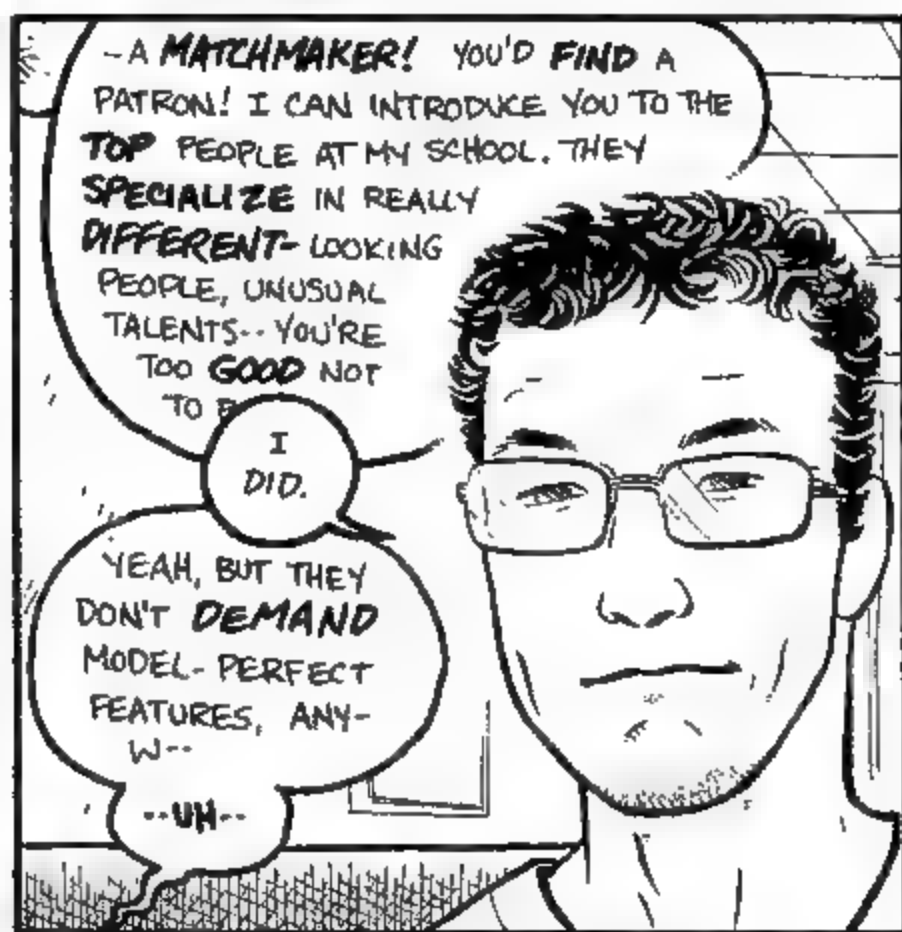
THE BEAUTY.
IT WAS FAKE.
WELL, NOT FAKE
EXACTLY, BUT
CREATED.

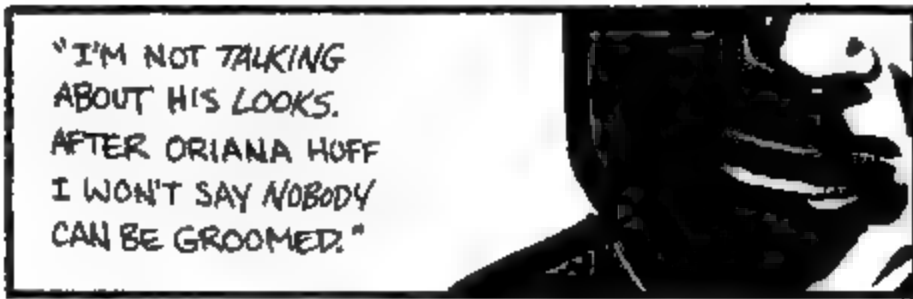


the
model's
artist

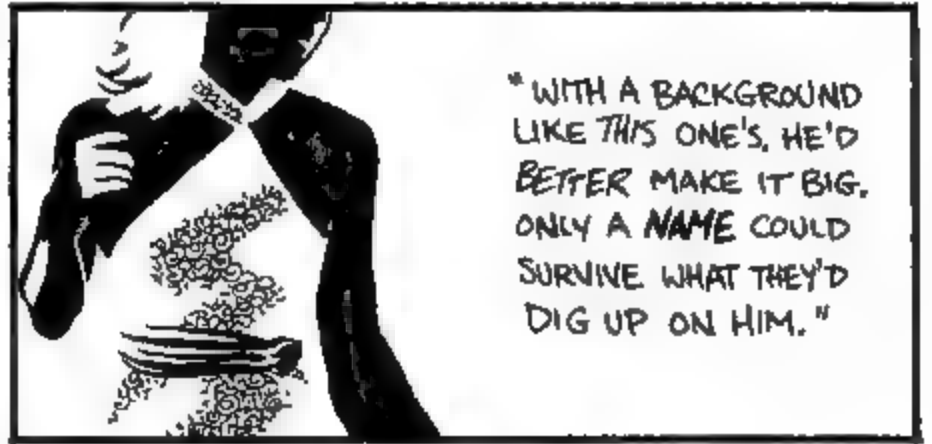








"I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT HIS LOOKS. AFTER ORIANA HOFF I WON'T SAY NOBODY CAN BE GROOMED."



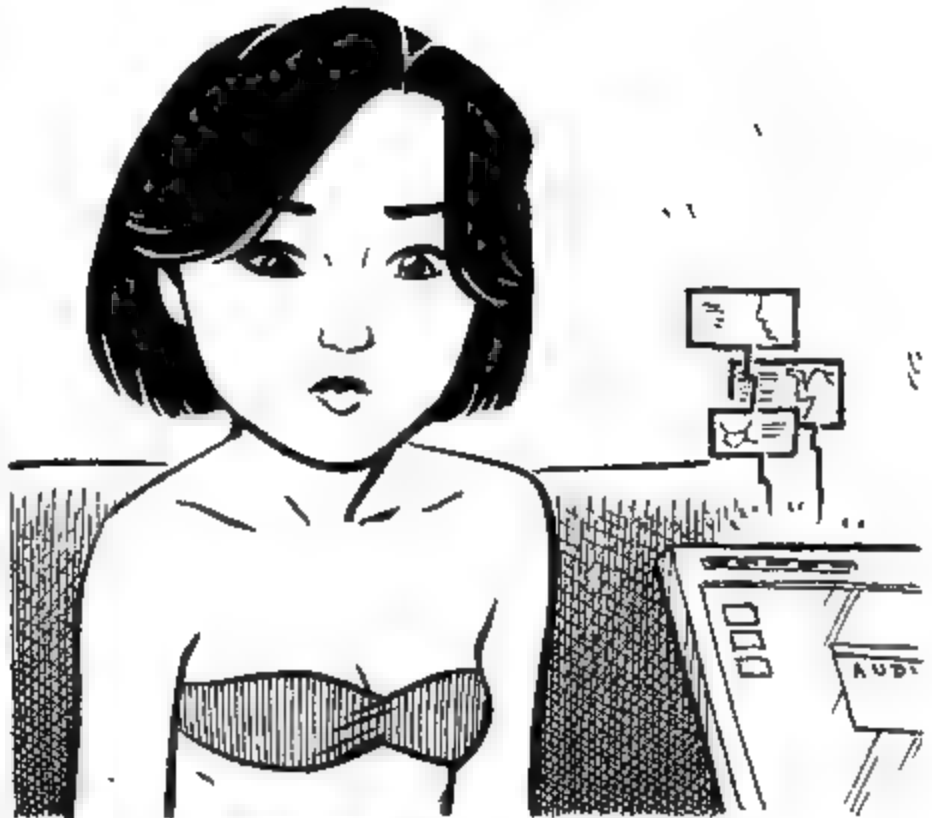
"WITH A BACKGROUND LIKE THIS ONE'S, HE'D BETTER MAKE IT BIG. ONLY A NAME COULD SURVIVE WHAT THEY'D DIG UP ON HIM."



"HE'S TALENTED. SOMEBODY WILL ALWAYS GO FOR THAT."



"NO. IT'S THE QUIET ART-APPRECIATION TYPES WHO WOULD WANT HIM, AND THEY DON'T TOLERATE SCANDAL."



"THERE'S NOTHING TO ARGUE ABOUT."

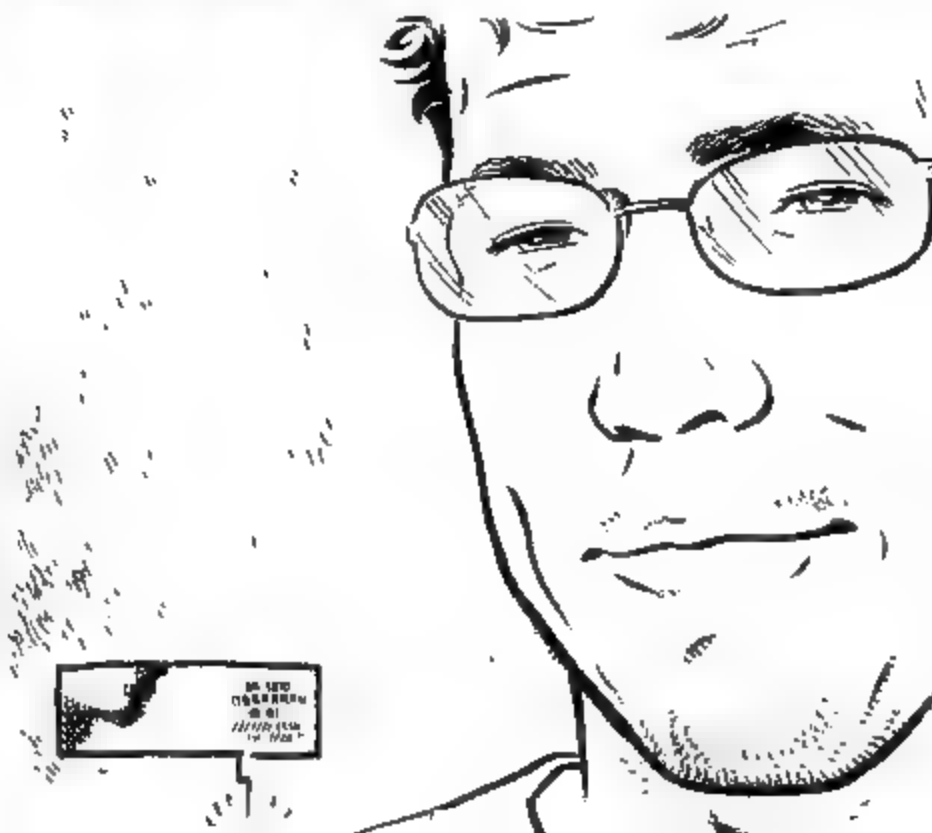


"HE'S JUST UNFUCKABLE. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT HIS LOOKS."

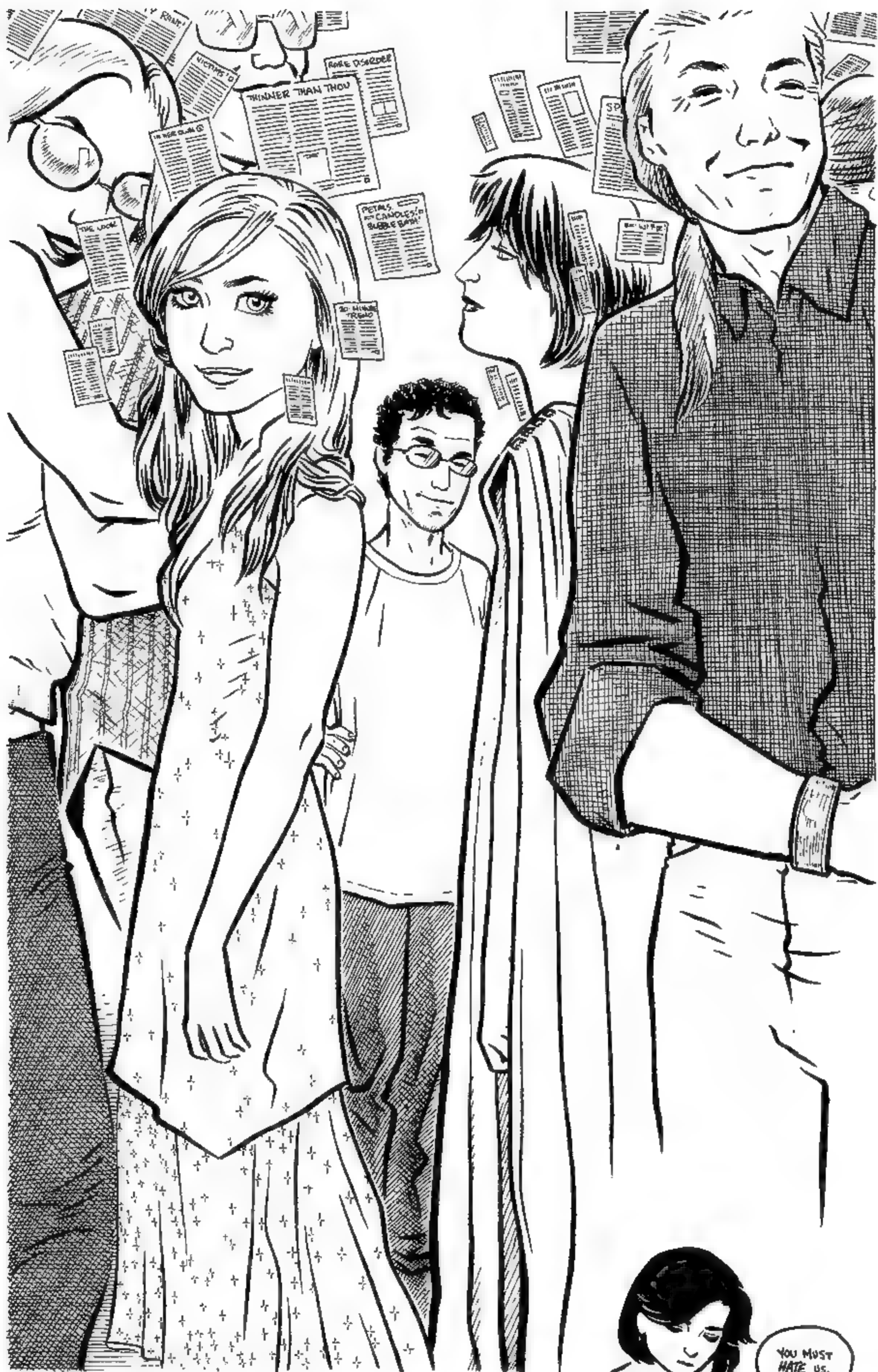


"WITH A BACKGROUND LIKE THIS ONE'S HE'D HAVE TO MAKE IT BIG TO MAKE IT AT ALL, AND HE WON'T."

"IT'S THE QUIET-LIFERS WHO WON'T CARE ABOUT STAR QUALITY, AND THEY WON'T WANT"

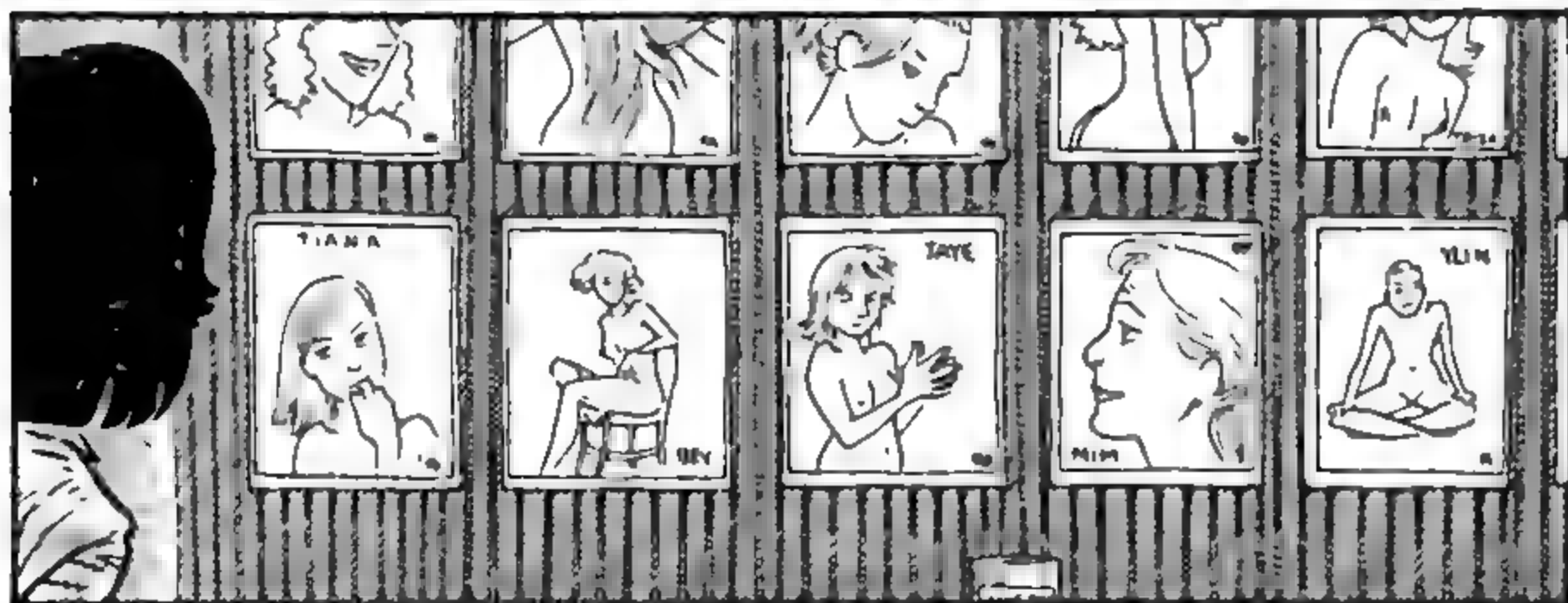
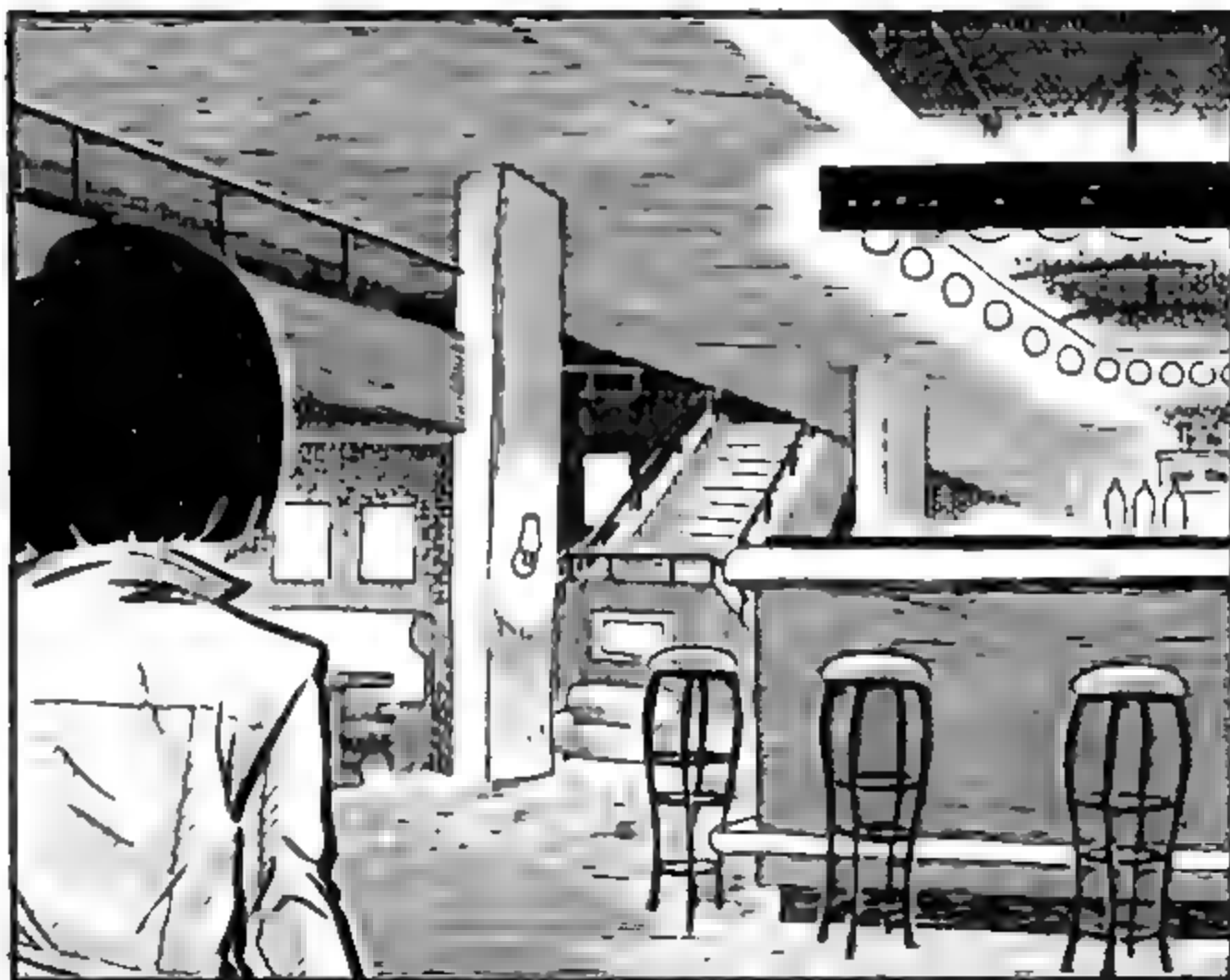


IN THE
COURTROOM
ON 11
JULY 1998
IN THE





















WELL, THANKS. AND THANKS FOR
RUNNING ME TO WORK.

MY PLEASURE,
OFF COURSE...



BUT ISH
THISH **WORK**?
I THOUGHT IT
WASS CLASS...
OR ISH IT
HOME?

YES, YES,
AND YES... I'LL
CALL YOU!



I **DON'T** SEE WHY I HAVE
TO SUBMIT TO AN ADMISSION
INTERVIEW JUST TO COME
TO A **WHOREHOUSE**.

YOU DO AT
ANY RESPECTABLE
ONE, SIR. IF YOU
DON'T LIKE IT,
YOU CAN GO TO
MACFLEISS'S.

AND IF YOU **INSIST** ON
BEING CRUDE, YOU'RE
GONNA **HAVE** TO, BUD.
THAT'S STRIKE ONE.

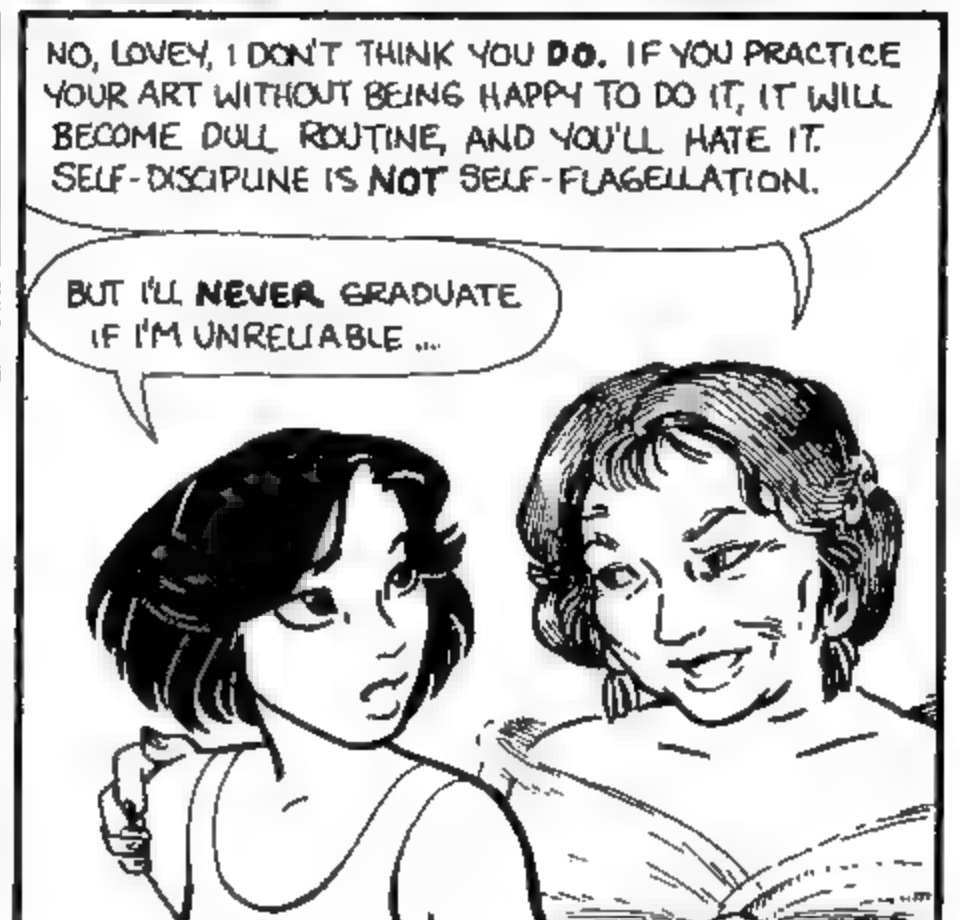
HI,
GEORGE.

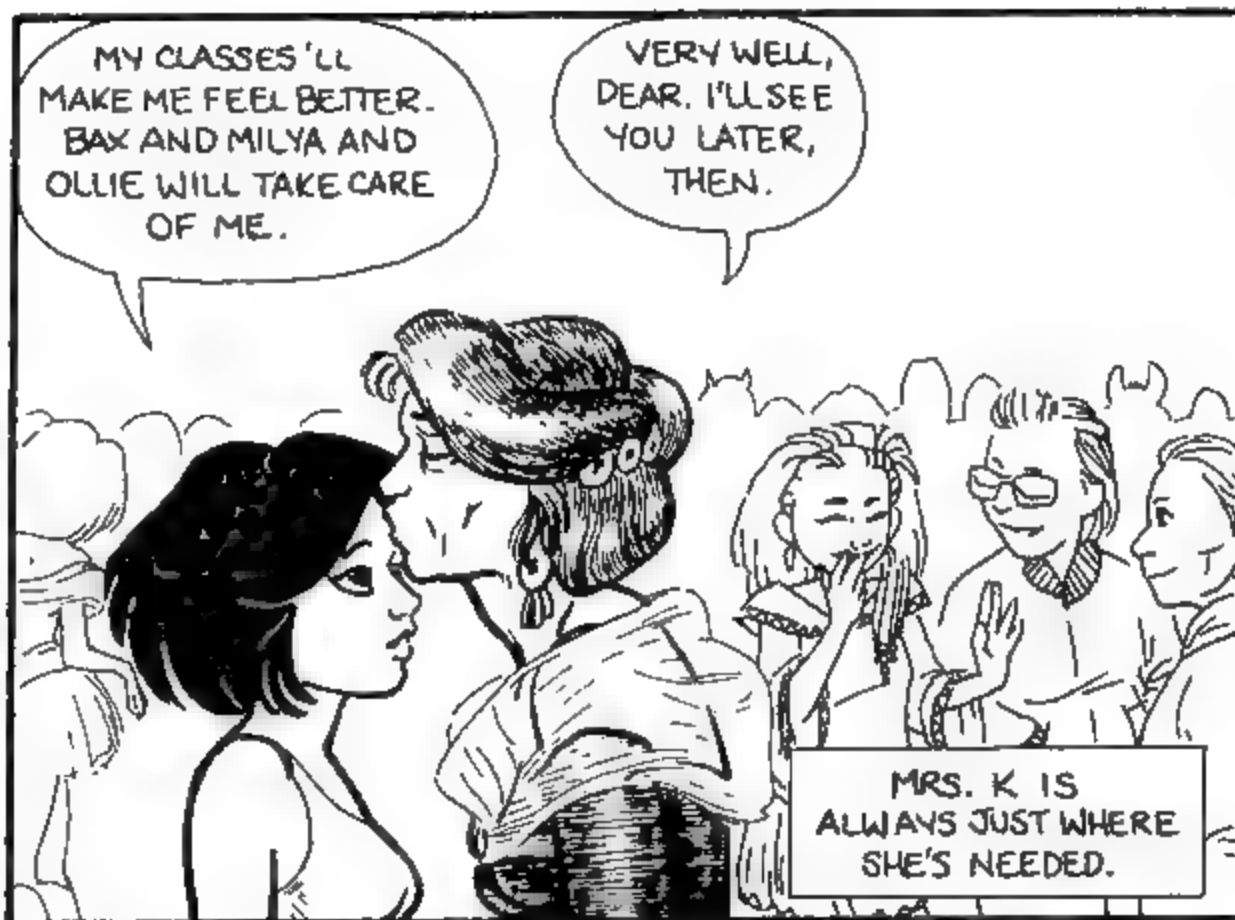
HI,
VARY.

RECEPTION



WHEWW...
HOME, SWEET
HOME!



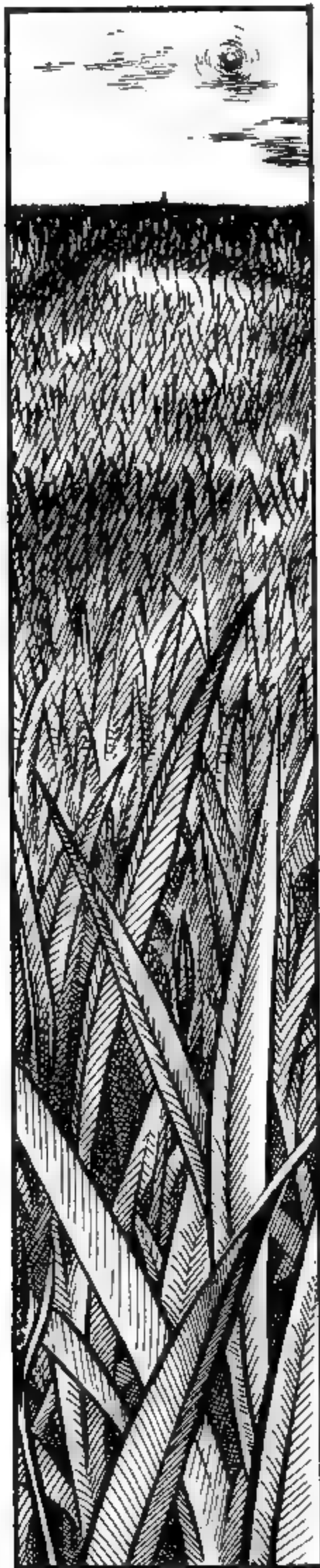






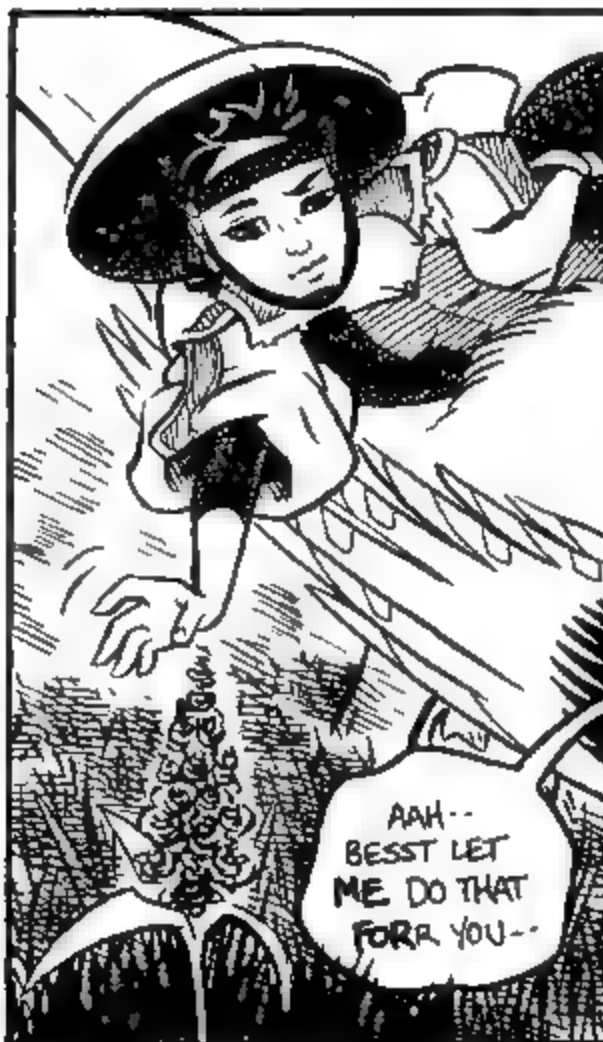


part two.



out.

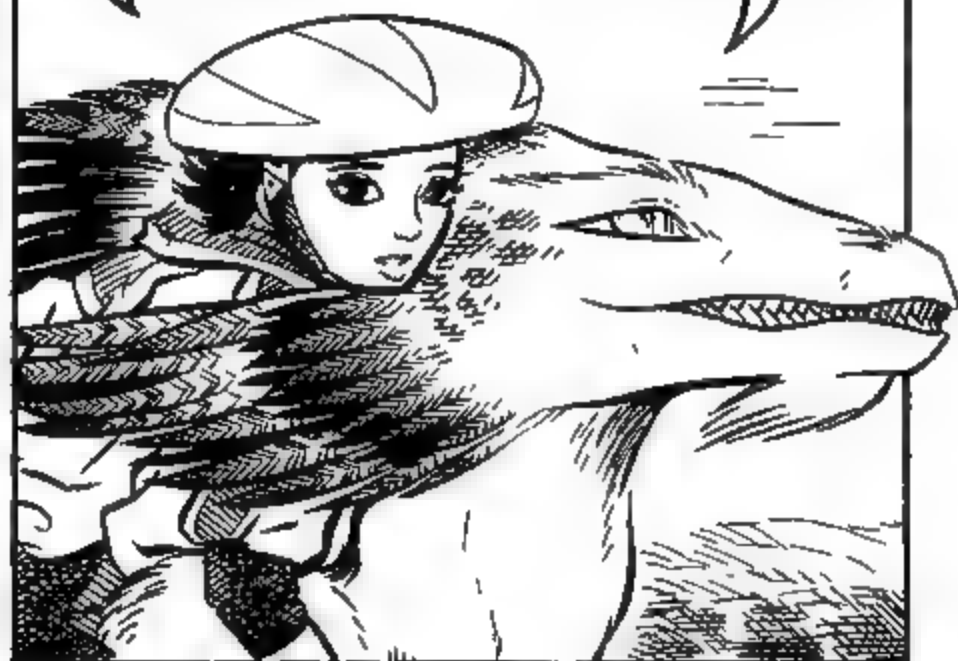






SHAR, WHY WON'T... I MEAN, YOU KNOW HOW HE IS, STUBBORN, BUT-- WHY WON'T HE RIDE ON YOU? YOU COULD HAVE--

TCH-TCH-- ISSNT IT RUDE TO SPEAK OF PEOPLE PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN THE THIRDD PERSSON?



BUT YOU COULD HAVE CARRIED ALL THIS STUFF AND MADE BETTER TIME--

DON'T YOU LIKE HAIXHA? I'M RRHATHER PROUD OF HER.



YES, SHE'S SWEET, BUT
= SIGH =



HEY!

HNH?

SINCE YOU ALREADY HAVE HAIXHA, WHY ARE WE GOING OUT SO FAR?

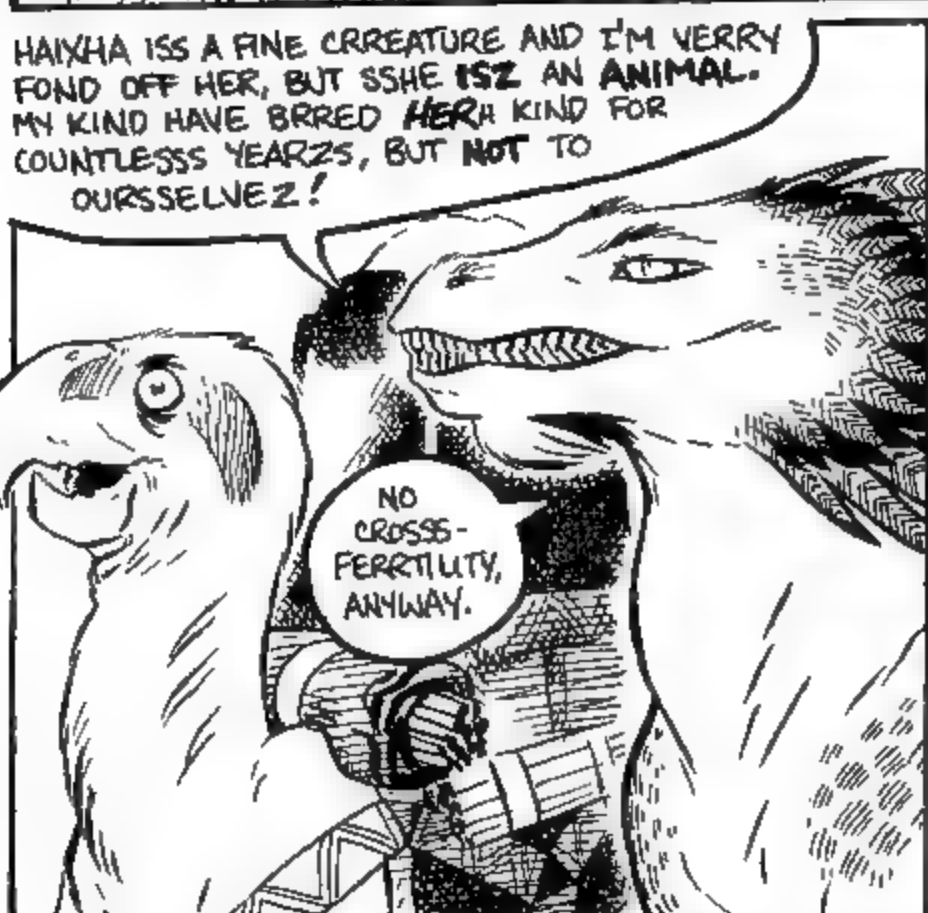


EXSSHCUSE ME?

YOU'RE GOING OUT TO THE RUNNING GROUNDS TO GET YOURSELF A GIRL, RIGHT? WELL, YOU SORTA ALREADY GOT ONE, SO--

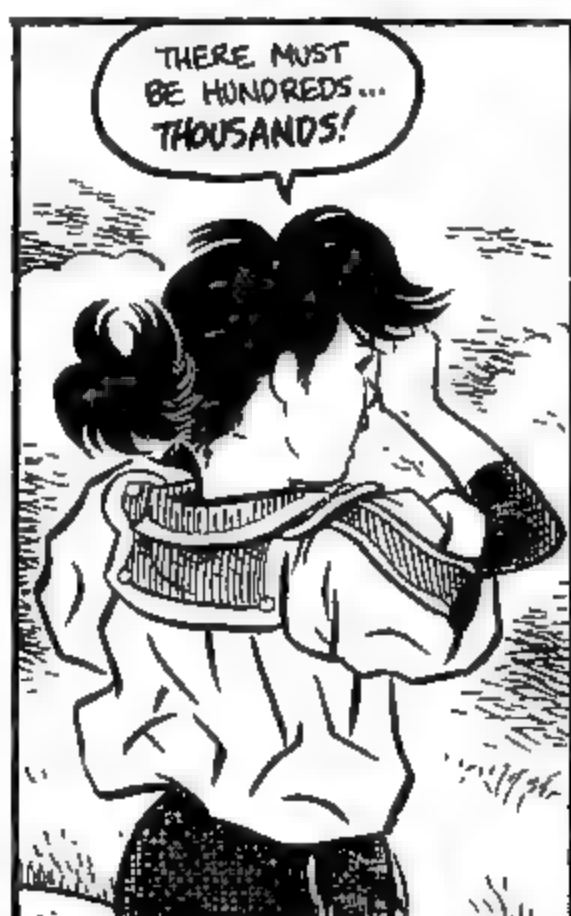


SNEE, SNEE, SNEE
SNEE, SNEE, SNEE!















• *easy being green* •

SEE, Y' GOTTA
UNDERSTAND MY
PERSPECTIVE ON
ALL THIS.

≡ SIGH ≡


I HAVE THIS
COMPLETELY STUPID
AND EMBARRASSING THING
ABOUT GETTING CRUSHES ON
MY PROFESSORS. I KNOW, I
KNOW HOW INCREDIBLY DUMB
THAT IS, SO JUST DON'T
TELL ME.

SO, I'M ALL CRUSHED OUT
ON TWO OF 'EM AT ONCE, SO I
GO OUT INTO THE MIDDLE OF
NOWHERE WITH THEM-- THEY'RE
PARTNERS, Y'SEE, SO I GO TOO,
JUST TO MAKE MYSELF USE-
FUL, STUDENT-BODY SLAVE
LABOR SORT OF THING.

AND OF COURSE I
CAN HARDLY GET MY TOES
UNCURLED AT THE THOUGHT
OF BEING 'FALOOOONE' ♪
WITH JUST THE TWO OF
THEM, SO NATURALLY
NEITHER ONE HAS ANY
TIME FOR ME AT
ALL.

SIGH





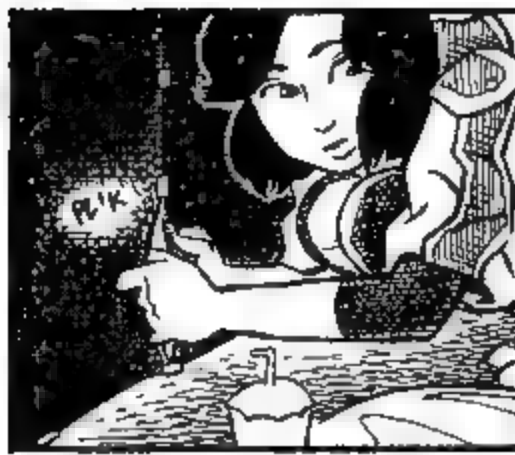
OKAY, IT ISN'T LIKE
I EXPECTED DR. SHAR
TO BE AROUND MUCH, SINCE
THE WHOLE POINT OF COMING
OUT HERE WAS SO HE COULD
JOIN IN ON THE LAESKE
MATING SEASON THING.

SO, HE'S
PREOCCUPIED,
NO BIG DEAL, BUT
I DIDN'T EXPECT
THEM TO KICK UP
ALL THIS DUST!

RUMBL RUMBL RUMBL

IMPOSSIBLE
TO SEE ANYTHING
IN THIS SOUP. AS FOR
DR. ZIVANCEVIC, HE
SERIOUSLY KED OVER
WHEN I TRIED TO
HELP HIM SET
UP HIS TENT.

SO HE WON'T COME OUT OF THE TENT BECAUSE OF THE DUST, AND I CAN'T GO IN BECAUSE...

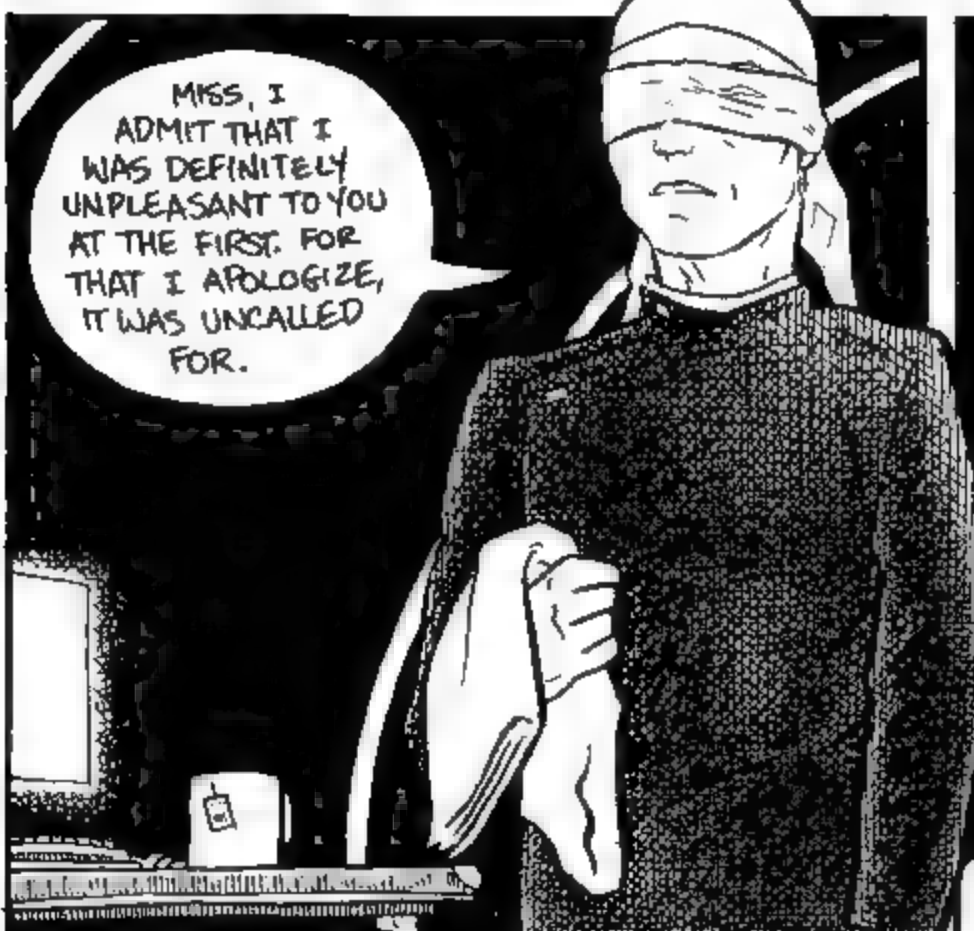
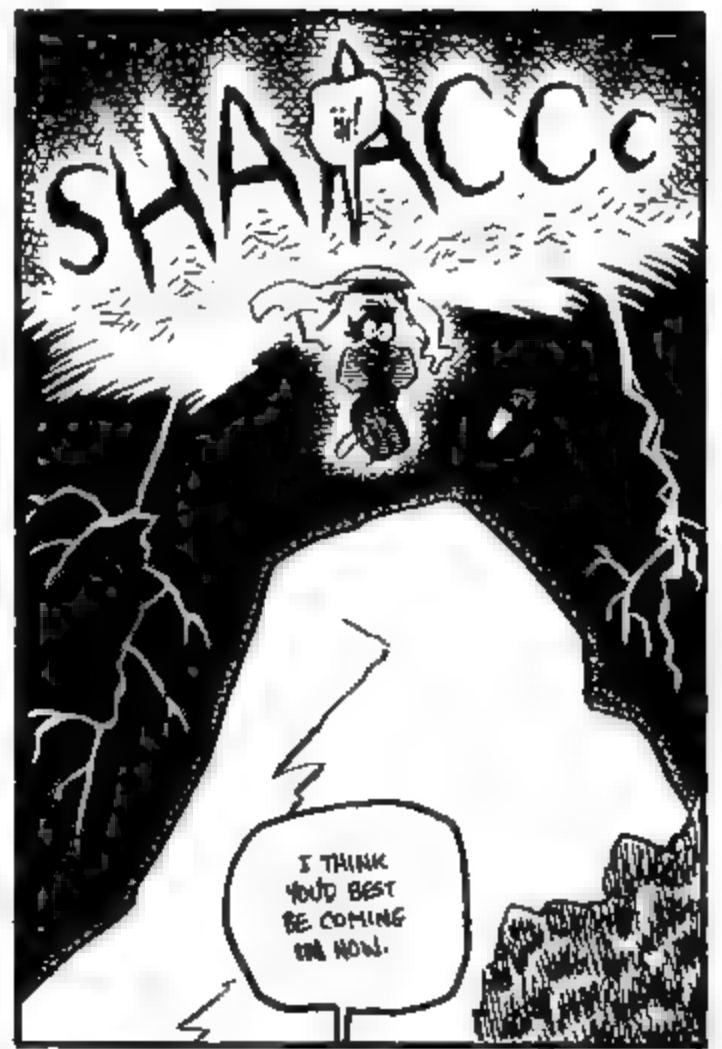


WHAT A LETDOWN. NO OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUT EXACTLY HOW LONG THOSE LAESKE TONGUES ARE. I MEAN, THEY COULD BE DOING ANYTHING DOWN THERE AND I WOULDN'T KNOW.

NO WEIRD ALIEN SEX ORGN TO GIVE DR. ZEE IDEAS, MAYBE MAKE HIM JUMP ON ME LIKE SOME KINDA HOT MONKEY LOVE MACHINE.

THANK GOD FOR KIWI-GINGER SMOOTHIES.







NEXT THING I REMEMBER, I'M OUTSIDE, NO IDEA HOW I GOT THERE. I THINK I USED UP ONE OF MY THREE WISHES OR SOMETHING. IT WASN'T UNTIL I WAS PANICKING OVER HOW LONG I'D HAVE TO WAIT BEFORE I RISKED SNEAKING BACK IN THAT I REALIZED I WAS REALLY BETTER OFF RIGHT WHERE I'D FOUND MYSELF.

STORY OF MY LIFE.



SUCH A NICE, SOFT, PATTERY RAIN, AND AFTER ALL THAT BLUSTER! PERFECT FOR SETTLING THE DUST. I WAS HALF OUT OF A DOZEN SNAPS AND ZIPPERS WHEN I RECALLED THAT THE DOCTOR, BEING BASICALLY A CITY MAN, WAS SURE TO HAVE A BIG THING AGAINST NUDITY.



BUT IS HE
BLIND
OR WHAT?

HE SURE
GETS AROUND
EASY ENOUGH
...

I DITHERED AND
GNASHED AWHILE
AND AT LAST SAID,
"WHAT THE HELL."

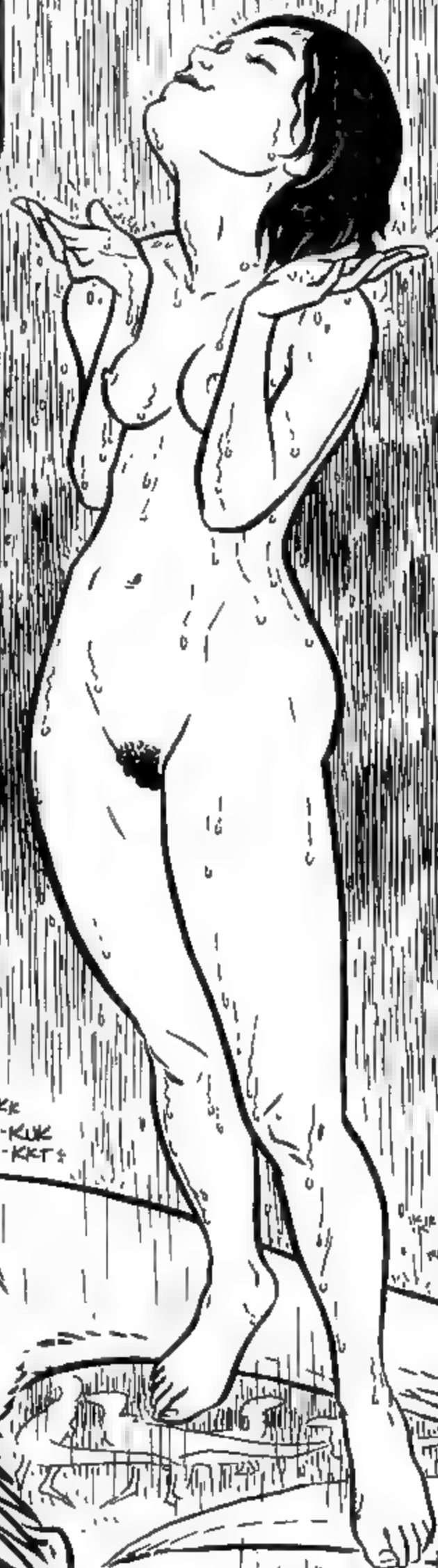
"EITHER HE'S
BLIND, AND I
HAVE ALL THE
PRIVACY A GIRL
COULD ASK FOR,
OR HE CAN SEE,
IN WHICH CASE
..."



IF HE CAN SEE,
WELL HOW CAN
HE WITH THAT
BANDANNA
ON?

IF HE CAN'T
SEE, WHY DID
HE TAKE THAT
THING OFF THAT
ONE TIME?

"...LET HIM
GET HIS
EYES FULL."



BRILLIANT

EKKEKEK
EKKEKEK

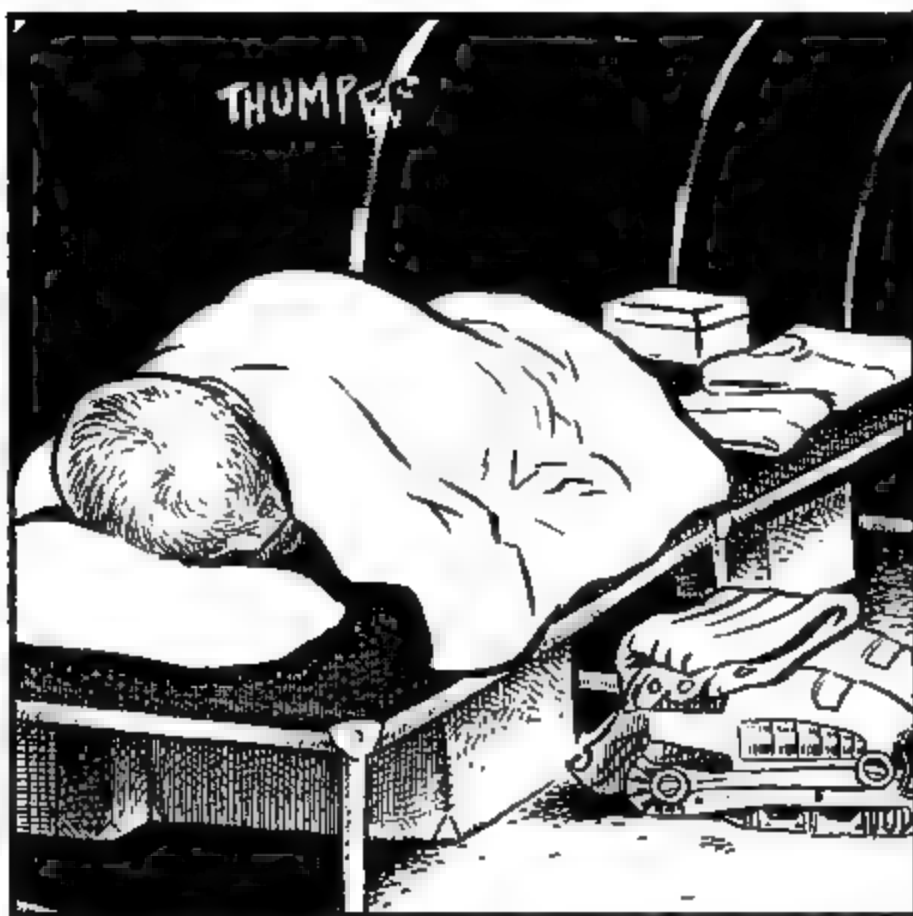
RIKRIK
RIKRIKRIK
RIKRIK

AHH

BREEEEEEEE!!!

IK IK IK
IKKIKKIKKI

KUK KUK KUK
KUK-KUK-KUK-KUK
K-K-K-K-K-K



ALL DAY,
SAME
DANCE.

THE MALES WOULD PRANCE AND POSE. THE FEMALES, IF THEY PAID ANY ATTENTION AT ALL, WOULD SQUARE OFF WITH THEM ONE AT A TIME; HEAD BOB, HEAD BOB, CIRCLE. OTHER MOVES TOO, SOMETIMES; OR THEY'D JUST DO THAT OVER AND OVER, THEN, AS OFTEN AS NOT, SHE'D JUST WALK OFF AND LEAVE HIM THERE.

THEN IT STARTS ALL OVER. HEAD BOB, HEAD BOB, CIRCLE, POSE... THEN **ZOOM!** WAY, WAY UP IN THE AIR THEY'D GO. YOU'D NEVER THINK THAT SUCH BIG, HEAVY... PEOPLE COULD JUMP SO HIGH!

BIG FLURRY OF FEATHERS AS THE MALES CAME DOWN; THEY'D DO ALL THESE FANCY MOVES AS THEY FELL. AND **BOOM!** FAR AS I COULD TELL, MAKING A REALLY BIG NOISE WHEN LANDING WAS IMPORTANT.

APART FROM THAT, I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT THE RULES TO SAVE MY LIFE! THEY MUST BE TESTING THE MALES FOR SOMETHING... ENDURANCE MAYBE, 'CAUSE APART FROM ALL THIS NOTHING WAS HAPPENING!

C'MON, GIRLS, GET WITH THE PROGRAM!





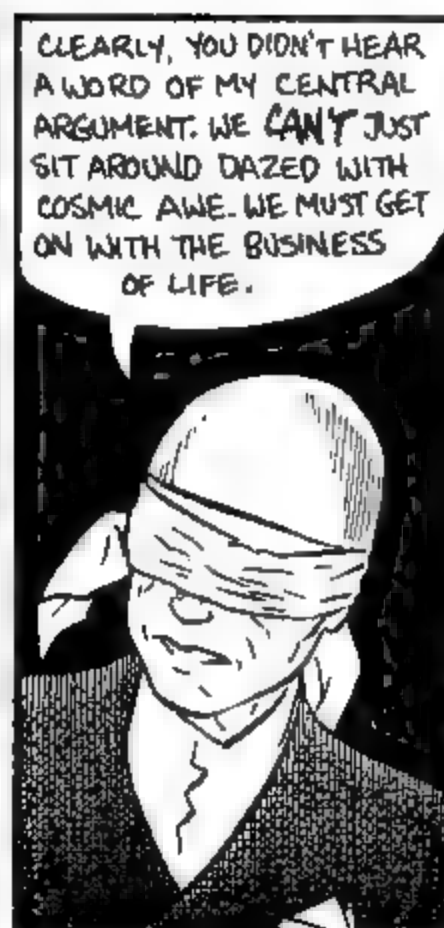


ANYWAY, YOU'RE RIGHT. WE SHOULD BE MORE AWARE... MORE... GRATEFUL.



NON-SENSE.

HUH?



CLEARLY, YOU DIDN'T HEAR A WORD OF MY CENTRAL ARGUMENT. WE CAN'T JUST SIT AROUND DAZED WITH COSMIC AWE. WE MUST GET ON WITH THE BUSINESS OF LIFE.



CLINK

BUT WHAT ABOUT... OH, TAKING TIME OUT TO, UH... SMELL THE ROSES?



BUT YOU YOURSELF SAID--



WISDOM, MISS, IS A MORTAL MIRACLE. A CONTRADICTION. OPPOSITES ATTRACT EACH OTHER ONLY TO CANCEL ONE ANOTHER OUT.

WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU FIND NO TRUTH IN CLICHÉS.

WHEN YOU'RE NO LONGER YOUNG, YOU CLING TO THE FOND HOPE THAT BELIEF WILL BREATHE WISDOM INTO BANALITIES.



AND WHEN YOU'RE A TEACHER, YOU WANT SO MUCH TO BE WISE.



HMM



TAK TAK TAKKA





OH, I WAS
HOT! MAD
AS FIRE!

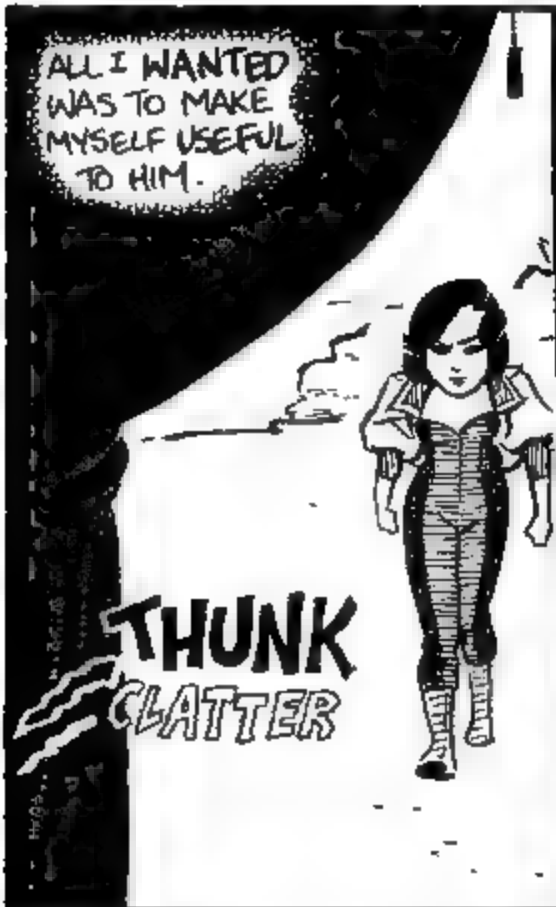
FIRST I WAS MAD
'CAUSE HE SEEMED
TO WANT IT. HE
LIKES FIGHTING.

I
DON'T.



THEN I WAS MAD
'CAUSE I GOT OFF
A ZINGER AND I
WASN'T TRYING TO;
DIDN'T MEAN TO,
AND I NEVER
GET OFF A GOOD
ONE WHEN I NEED
TO, SO I DON'T TRY.

I DON'T LIKE TO
FIGHT, I DON'T WANT
TO BE MEAN, AND
CRYING PISSES ME OFF.



ALL I WANTED
WAS TO MAKE
MYSELF USEFUL
TO HIM.

THUNK
CLATTER



BEFORE WE LEFT,
I'D FOUND AN
ARTICLE ON THE
NET WRITTEN BY
SOME GUY WHO
SUPPOSEDLY HAS
NO HANDS WHO
SAID HANDICAPPED
PEOPLE DON'T WANT
HELP BECAUSE IT
HUMILIATES THEM

BUT I DIDN'T THINK THAT APPLIED TO ME BECAUSE I DIDN'T
MEAN TO DO ANYTHING FOR HIM THAT I WOULDN'T DO
WITH ANY OTHER GUY!

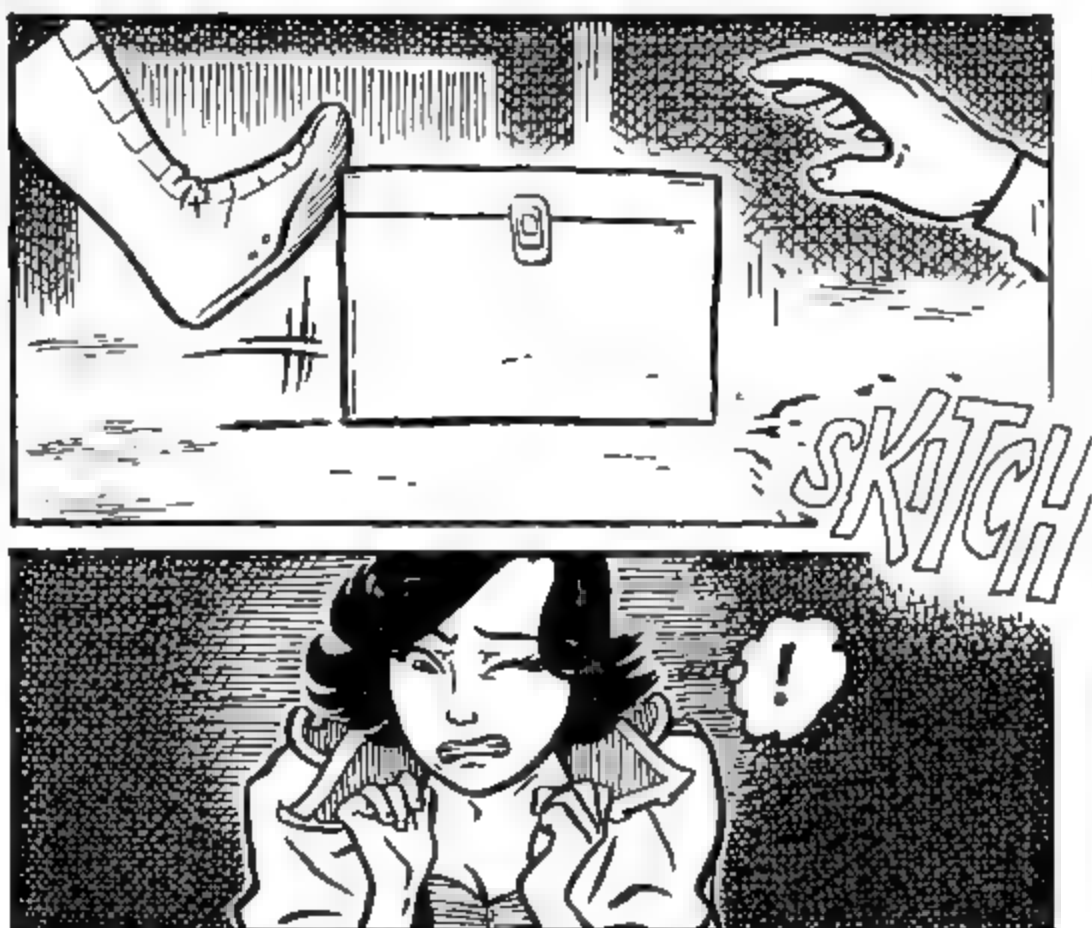
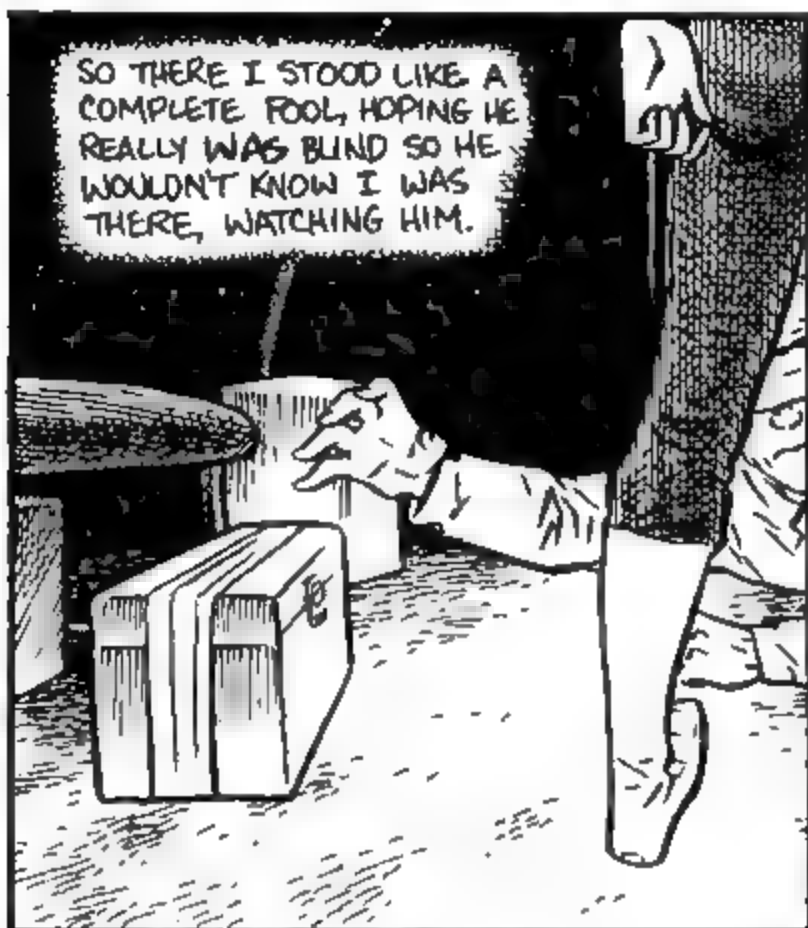


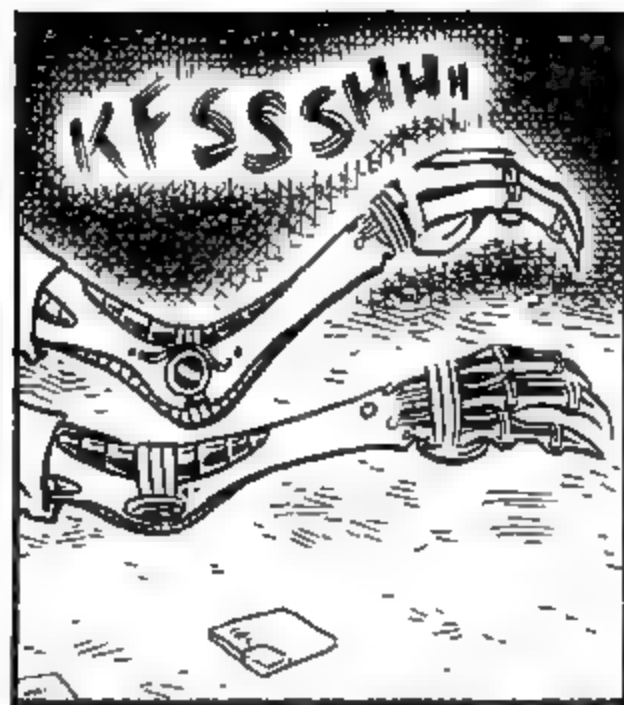
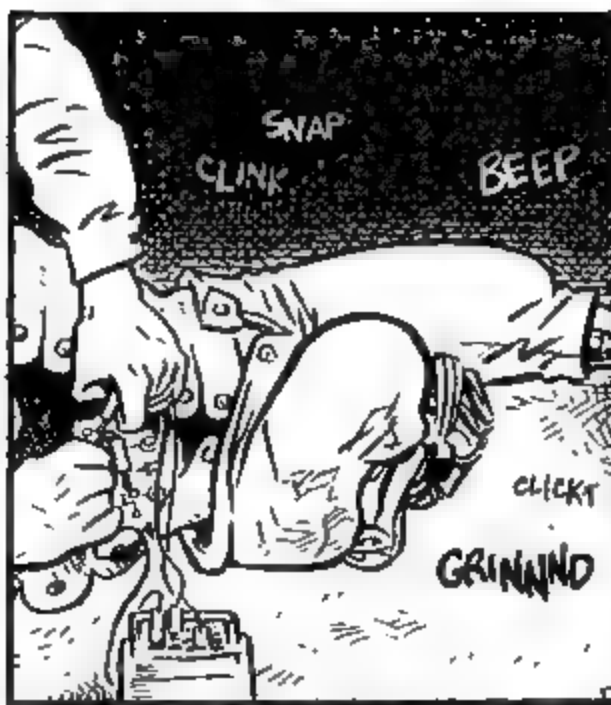
IF HE ONLY WANTS
TO BE TREATED
"JUST LIKE ANYBODY
ELSE," WHY WON'T
HE LET ME TREAT
HIM JUST LIKE
ANYBODY ELSE??

OH,
BUT IF
ALL HE
WANTS
IS A
FIGHT--



HELL ...!





HOW BIG
A JERK
AM I?



BLIND OR NOT -- I'VE
NO RIGHT TO STAND
HERE STARING --



GET OUT, GET OUT,
QUICKLY, QUIETLY--



HOW BIG
A JERK
AM I?



SIR... ARE
YOU WELL?

I
THOUGHT
I
HEARD
SOMETHING
FALL.



I'M
FINE.

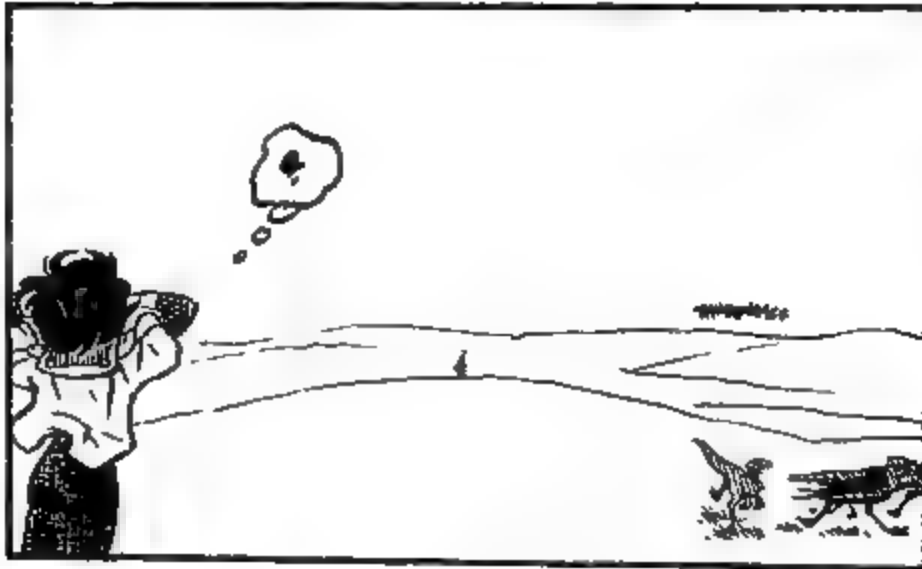
THANK
YOU.

ARE YOU
BLIND?

OR IS THERE JUST A BIG
BLIND SPOT WHERE I
SHOULD BE, BECAUSE
I'M SO RUDE, I'M
BENEATH YOUR NOTICE?

RIGHT NOW,
I GUESS I'LL
TAKE EITHER.

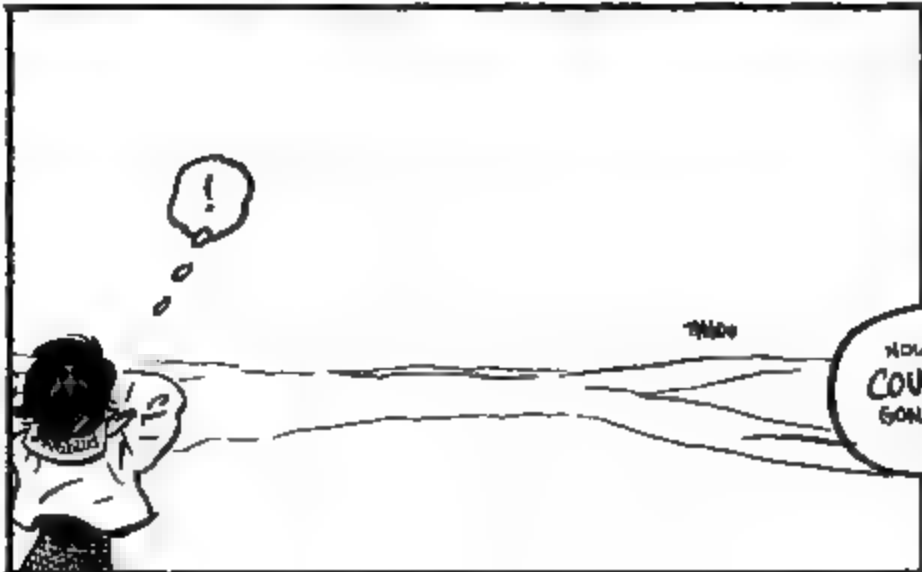
I JUST
DON'T WANT
TO FIGHT.



HELP... LET'S
SEE IF THIS
ARMOR-CLOTH
STUFF IS ALL ITS
CRACKED UP
TO BE...

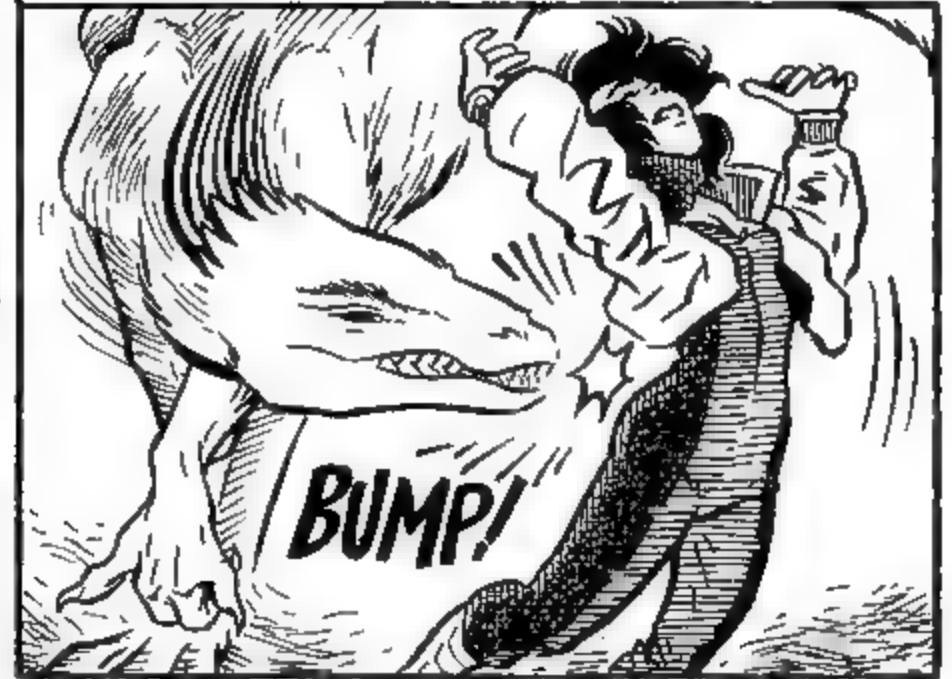
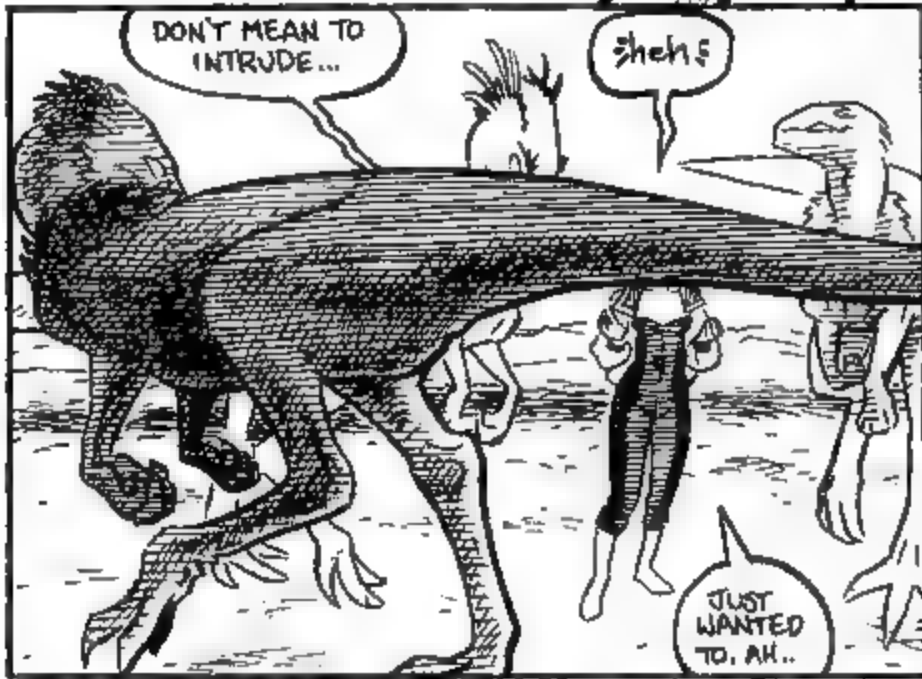


NOO, NO, I
AMN'T AFRAIDA
NO SANGRASS...

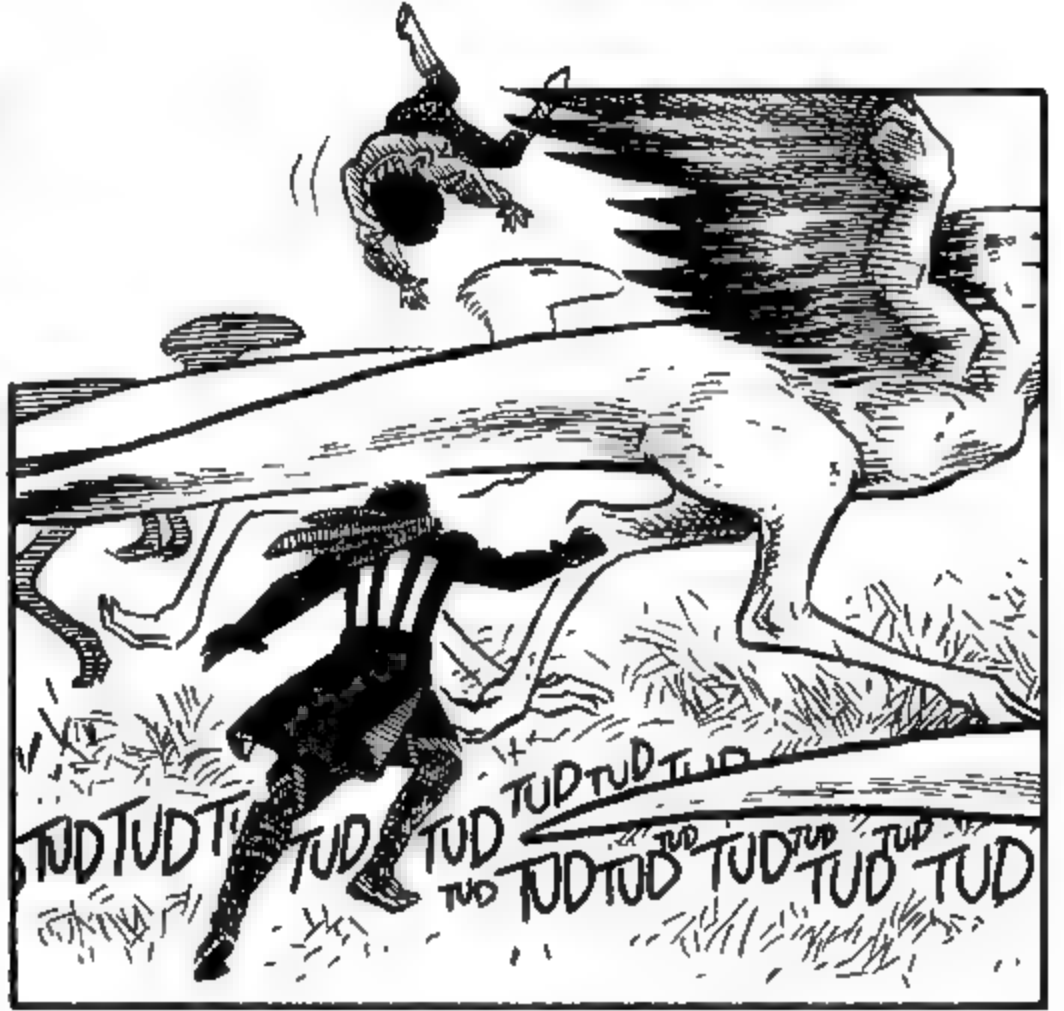


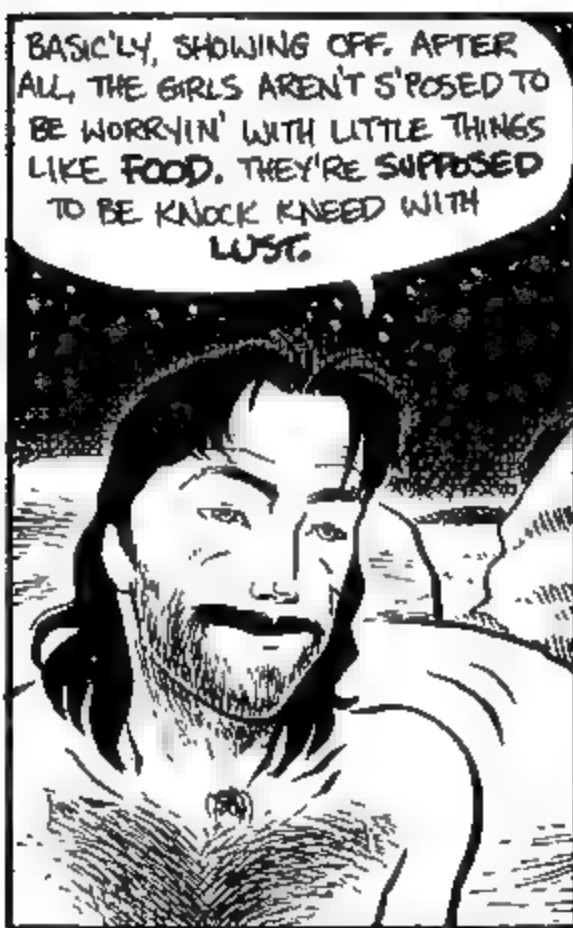
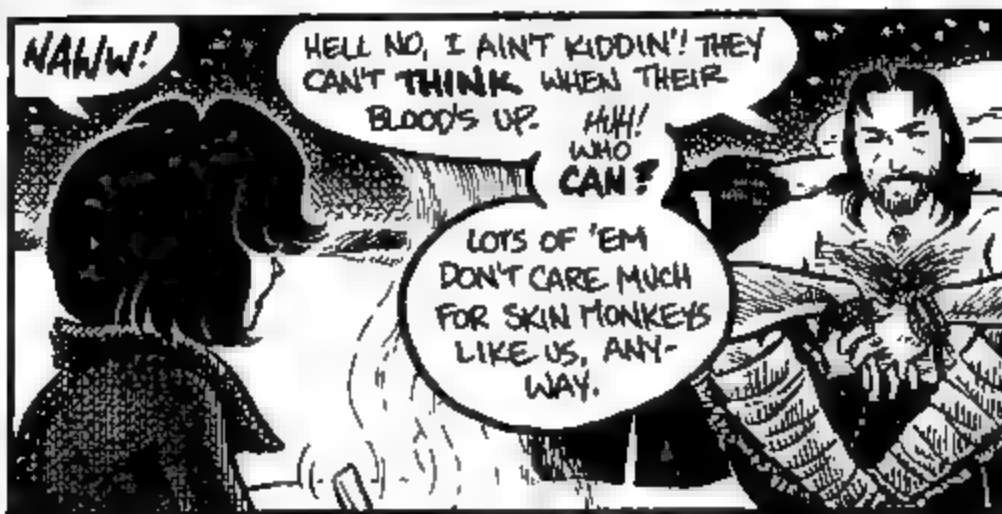
NOW WHERE
COULD YOU HAVE
GONE, YA NING-
NONG?













KEE-RACKK!

NOW, YOU CAN ONLY HAVE...

AND YOU ARE IN NO WAY TO BE JEALOUS OF ME.

HALF OF IT...

I DIP.

IF YOU ARE JEALOUS OF ME, YOU ARE JEALOUS OF THE TRADITION WHO SAID.



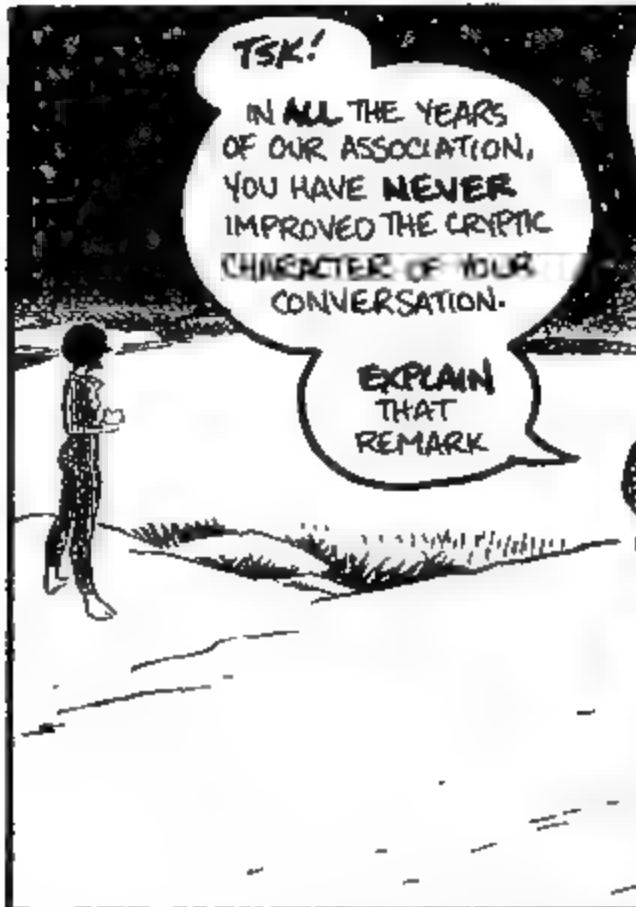
OH!

I HAVE ONLY MY PARTNER SHAR'S INTERESTS IN HEARTS, I ASSURE YOU



SOMETHING'S... BURNING, LOOK!

YEP...PROB'LY OL' SNAKE-OIL JOHN, STILL NOT TAKING "NO" FOR AN ANSWER.



TSK!

IN ALL THE YEARS OF OUR ASSOCIATION, YOU HAVE NEVER IMPROVED THE CRYPTIC CHARACTER OF YOUR CONVERSATION.

EXPLAIN THAT REMARK

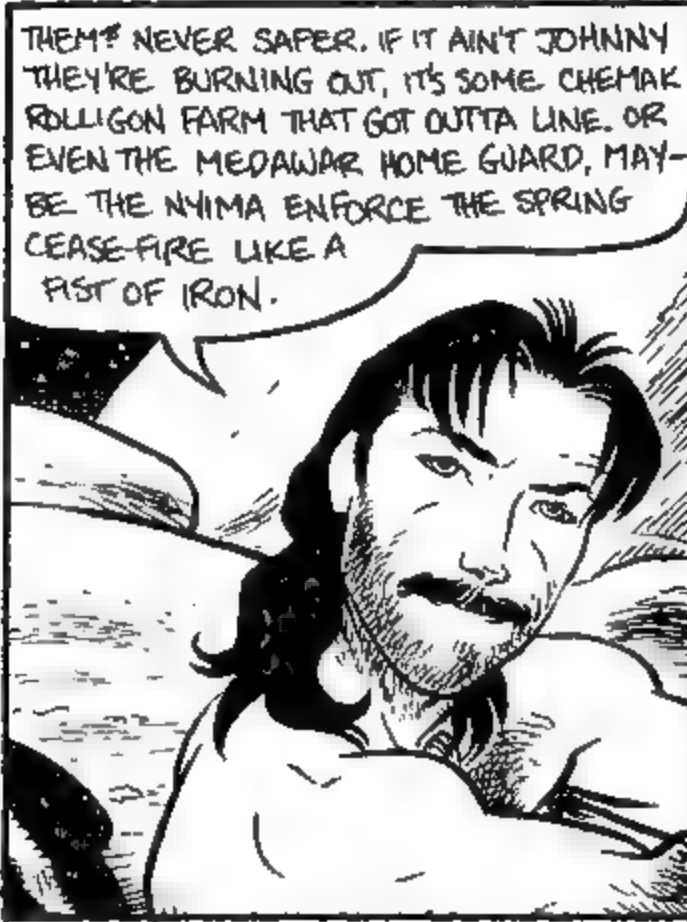


OH, I CAME OUT WITH SOME BOZO WHO WANTS TO SELL PORTABLE MEAT FREEZERS TO THE NYIMA. I TOLD 'IM THEY WON'T BUY ANYTHING THEY CAN'T BUILD THEMSELVES, BUT HE DIDN' WANNA LISTEN...



TOUCHY GIRLS, THE CATS ARE.

BUT THE FIRE... COULDN'T THE LAESKE BE IN DANGER?



THEY'RE NEVER SAFER. IF IT AIN'T JOHNNY THEY'RE BURNING OUT, IT'S SOME CHEMAK ROLLIGON FARM THAT GOT OUTTA LINE. OR EVEN THE MEDAWAR HOME GUARD, MAYBE THE NYIMA ENFORCE THE SPRING CEASE-FIRE LIKE A FIST OF IRON.



CEASE-FIRE?

THIS IS A WAR ZONE?

RIGHT OUT THERE, THERE'S FIGHTING...?



QUITE POSSIBLY. THESE HILLS ARE THE CONFLUENCE OF SO MANY TRADE ROUTES. THEY'VE BEEN DISPUTED AND INVADDED THROUGHOUT WRITTEN HISTORY.

...SO BLOOD SOAKED, THE MEDAWAR CLANS CALL IT "THE DANCING GROUND OF KING MARS."



SEVEN DIFFERENT ENTITIES CLAIM OWNERSHIP OF THIS DUSTY DESERT AT PRESENT. THEY LEAVE OFF SHOOTING ONE ANOTHER ONLY AS LONG AS THE FEATHERED SET ARE... PREOCCUPIED.

BUT WHY? AREN'T THE LAESKE JUST MORE RIVALS? SHAR SAID ALL THIS LAND BELONGS TO HIS PEOPLE.



SO IT DOES, AS MUCH AS TO ANYONE. IT'S BEEN THEIR TRADITIONAL MATING GROUND FOR SO LONG, IT'S BUILT INTO THEIR INSTINCTIVE MIGRATORY PATTERN. NO, THE NYIMA PROTECT THEM NOW BECAUSE THEY WANT THEIR FEATHERS AFTERWARD.

THEIR FEATHERS? BUT THEN SHAR IS IN DANGER! THEY MIGHT KILL HIM JUST AS EASILY AS ANYONE...



NO NO, HONEY. THEY JUST GATHER SHED FEATHERS. THE ONES THAT DON'T WIN--THE MALES THAT DON'T MATE--THEIR BREEDING PLUMAGE FALLS OUT.

NYIMA WOULDN'T KILL THEM NOW, WHEN SO MANY OF THEM ARE TOGETHER. THEY BEAT DOWN THE SAWGRASS; OTHER ANIMALS COME IN TO EAT THE STUFF. THAT MEANS GOOD HUNTING. THE HERDS HAVE BEEN BOOMING SINCE THE GRASS CAME BACK.

OH...



"A CLOUD BY DAY... A PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT."

WHAT?



BESIDE ALL THAT... THE LAESKE ARE THE EARTHLY EMBODIMENT OF THE NYIMA WAR GOD.



REALLY?

REALLY. THAT GOES BACK TO OLD TIMES. BEFORE ANYBODY KNEW THAT LAESKE SPEAK WITH WORDS, BUT OLD WAYS DIE HARD.



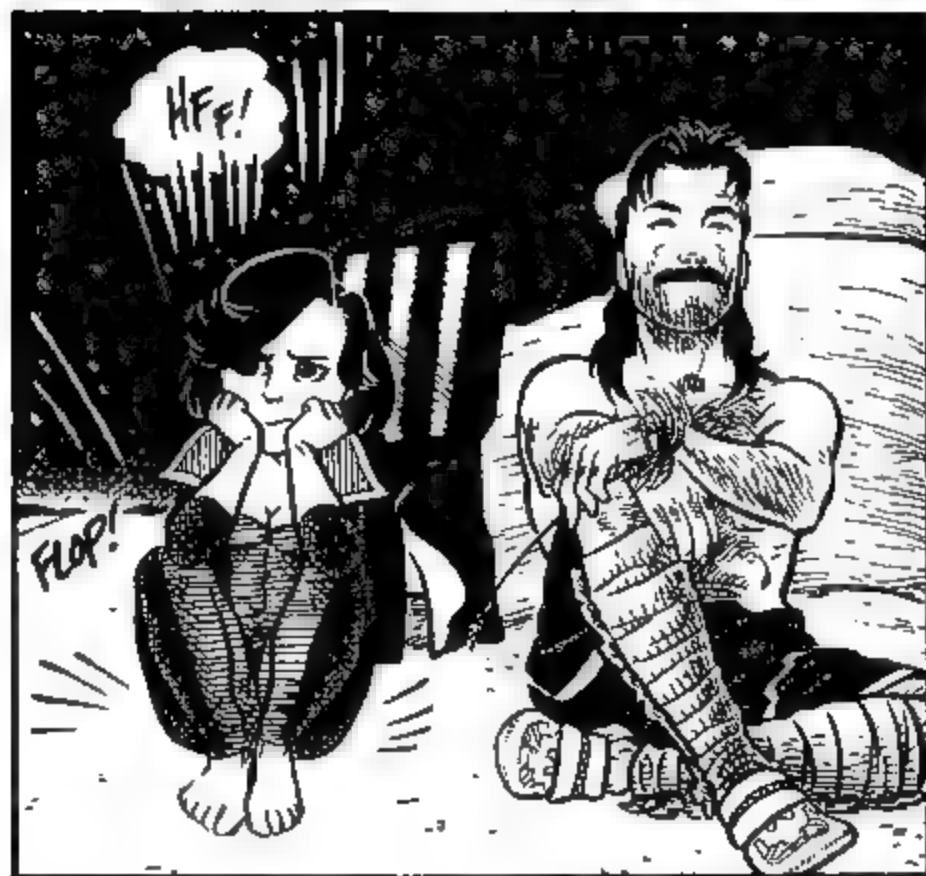
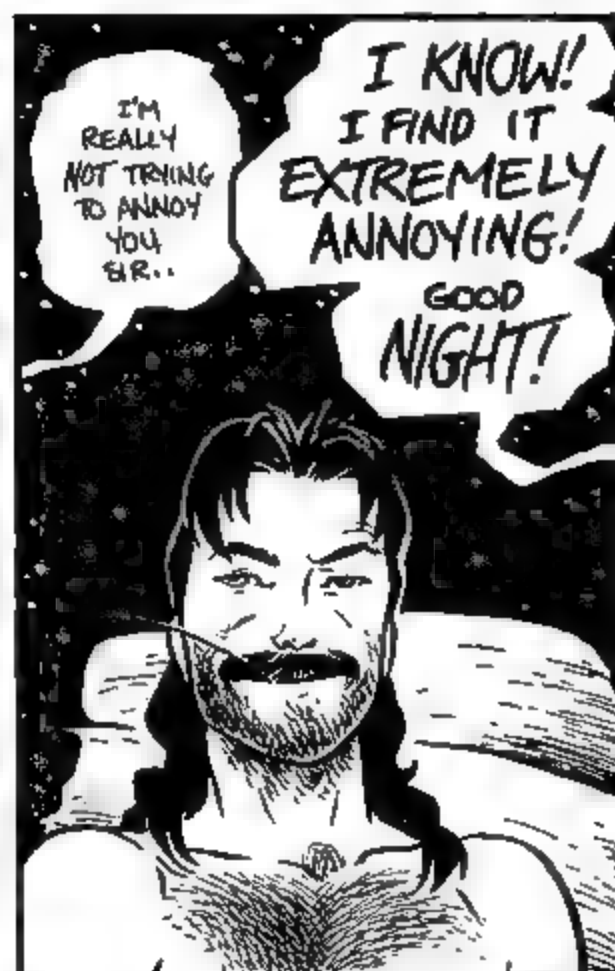
BUT THAT'S SO WEIRD... IF THE LAESKE ARE THE GOD OF WAR TO THE LION-WOMEN, WHAT DO THE NYIMA REPRESENT TO THE LAESKE?

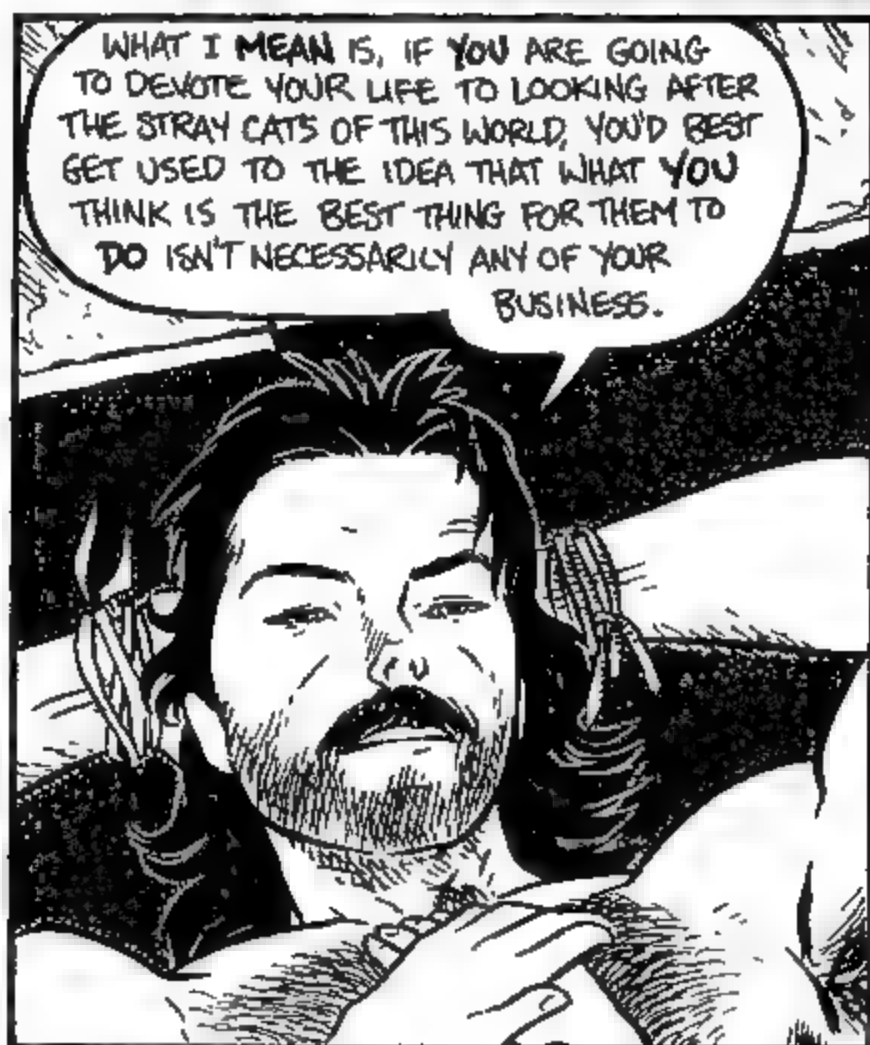
HEH! A HUGE PAIN IN THE ASS, PROBABLY.

HNH! HEH-HEH-HEH-



IS THIS
REALLY ONLY
THE FIRST TIME
I'VE
MADE HIM
LAUGH...?







OKAY:
LISTEN.

YOU KNOW
HOW TRIBES
THAT HAVE BEEN
AT WAR FOR
GENERATIONS
TRADE WITH
EACH OTHER?

IN A PREARRANGED
PLACE, ONE TRIBE WILL
LEAVE SOME STUFF. THEN
THEY GO AWAY-- BACK WAY
OFF AND WATCH.

THEN THE OTHER
TRIBE COMES IN. THEY
SEPARATE THE GOODS INTO
PILES THEY WANT AND PILES
THEY **DON'T**. THEY PUT DOWN
GOODS OF THEIR OWN NEXT
TO THE STUFF THEY WANT.

THE SECOND TRIBE THEN
WITHDRAWS SO THE FIRST
CAN COME BACK AND REARRANGE
THE PILES TO MAKE THEIR
COUNTEROFFER.

SOUNDS
LIKE LEAVING
A BOWL OF MILK
FOR A CAT, AND
EXPECTING THE
CAT TO BRING
YOU MICE.

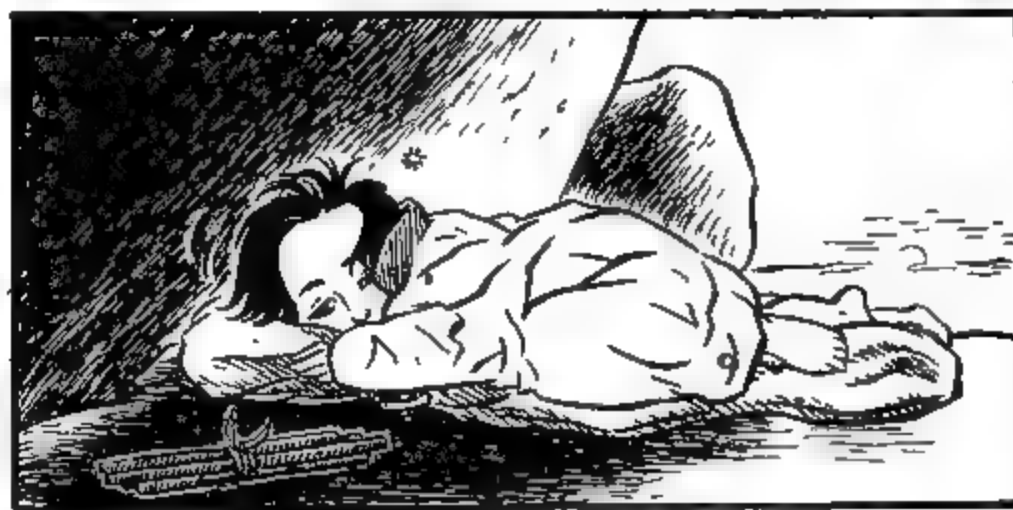
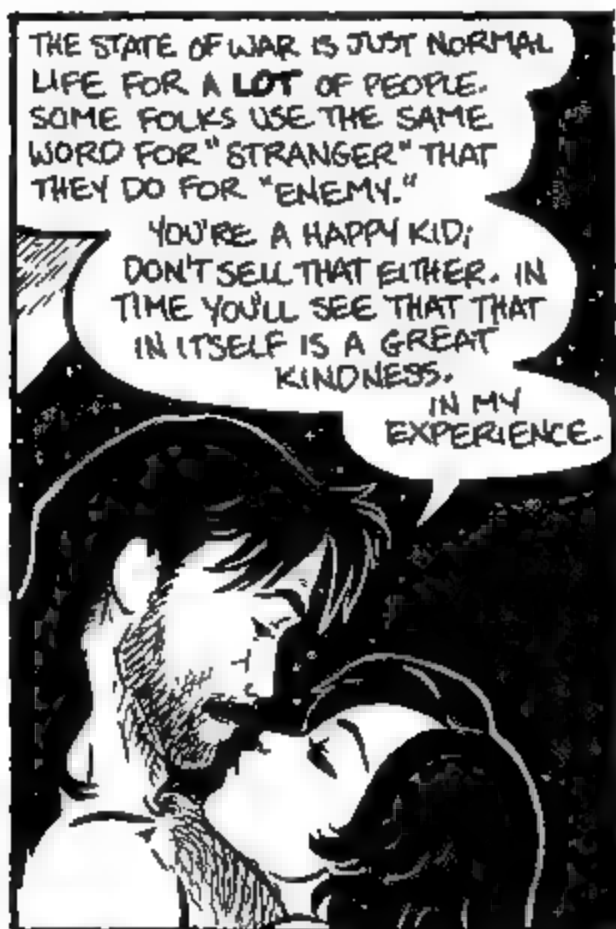
IF THAT'S
WHAT YOU WANT
FROM THE CAT.
IT'S UP TO YOU.

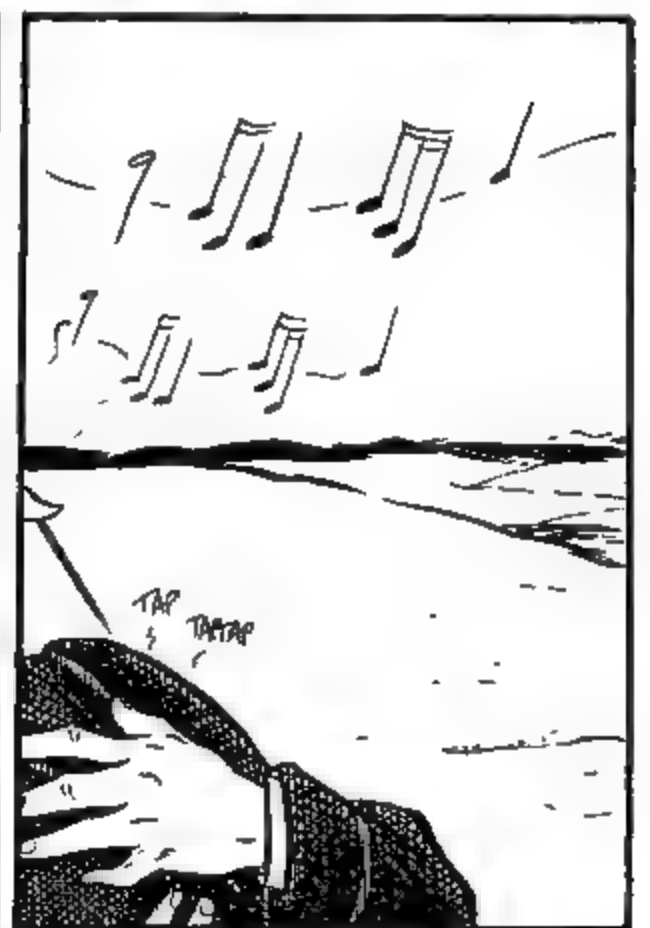
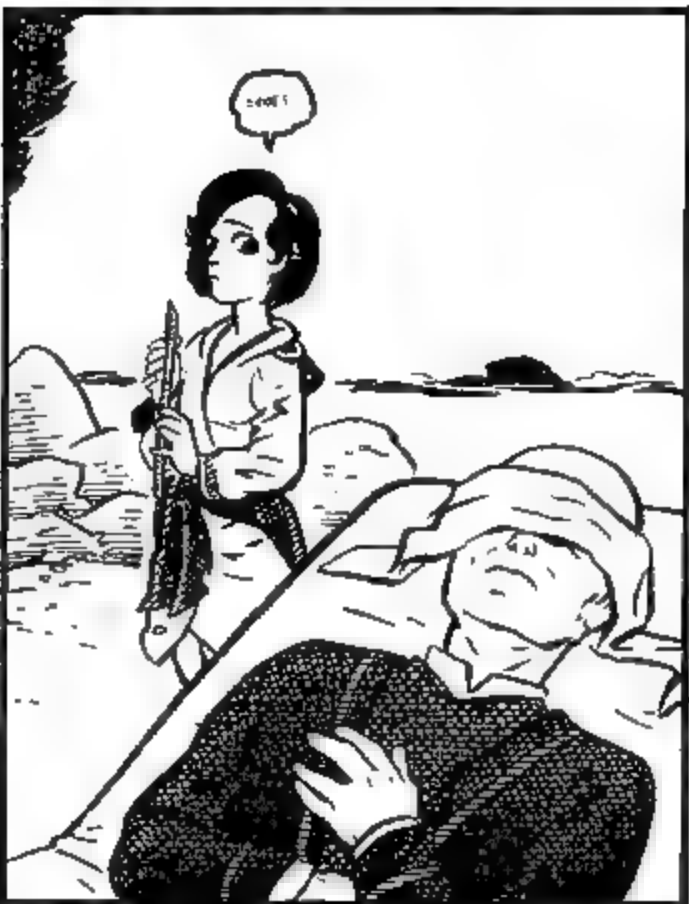
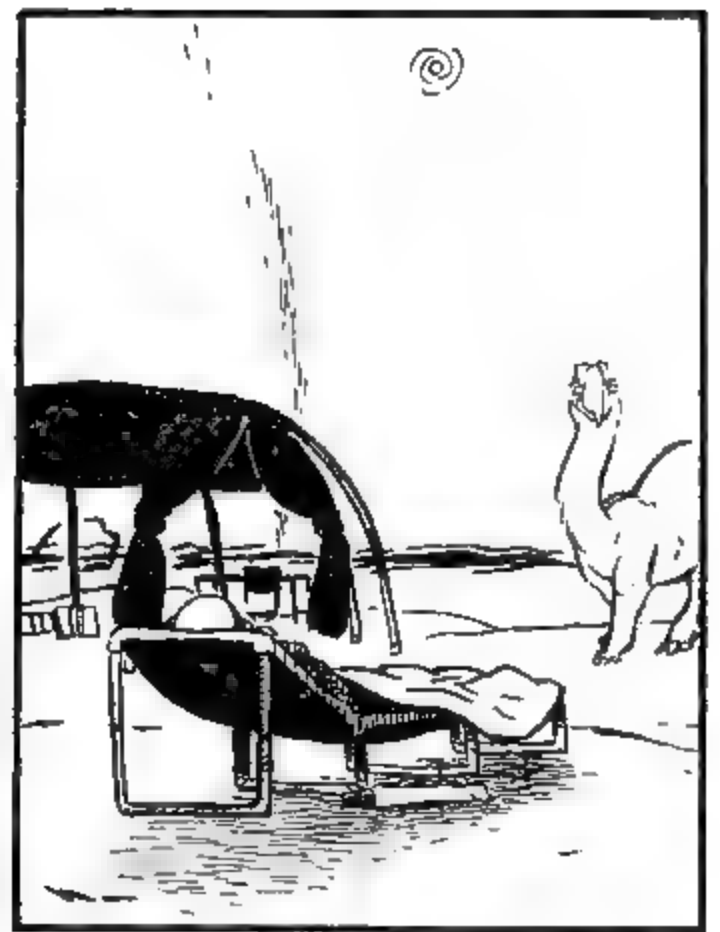
THERE ARE RULES.
THERE IS NO CONTACT.
AND THEY STILL KILL EACH
OTHER IF THEY MEET
EYEBALL TO EYEBALL.

BUT THIS METHOD WORKS
AND IS RESPECTED. SOMETIMES
THEY EVEN SWAP MARRIAGEABLE
CHILDREN. ONCE IN A **GREAT**
WHILE **THAT** EVEN LEADS TO
THE ENDING OF WAR.

DON'T... GIVE UP
YOUR LIFE EXPECTING
TO BE PAID WITH A
PLACE IN HIS. DON'T
TRY TO SHORTCUT
THE TRADE.

ACT AS IF YOU DON'T WANT
ANYTHING FROM HIM. **DON'T** WANT
ANYTHING IF YOU CAN HELP IT. DON'T
OFFER ADVICE AND THEN HOLD IT AGAINST
HIM IF HE WON'T TAKE IT AND WON'T EXPLAIN
WHY **NOT**. DON'T SHOW HIM HOW **SMART** YOU
ARE BY DISSECTING HIM WITH FABULOUS
INSIGHTS AS TO **WHY** HE WON'T FOLLOW YOUR
SENSIBLE ADVICE. DON'T WASTE HIS TIME
OR YOURS WORRYING ABOUT WHAT'S
WRONG WITH YOU FOR WANTING HIM.

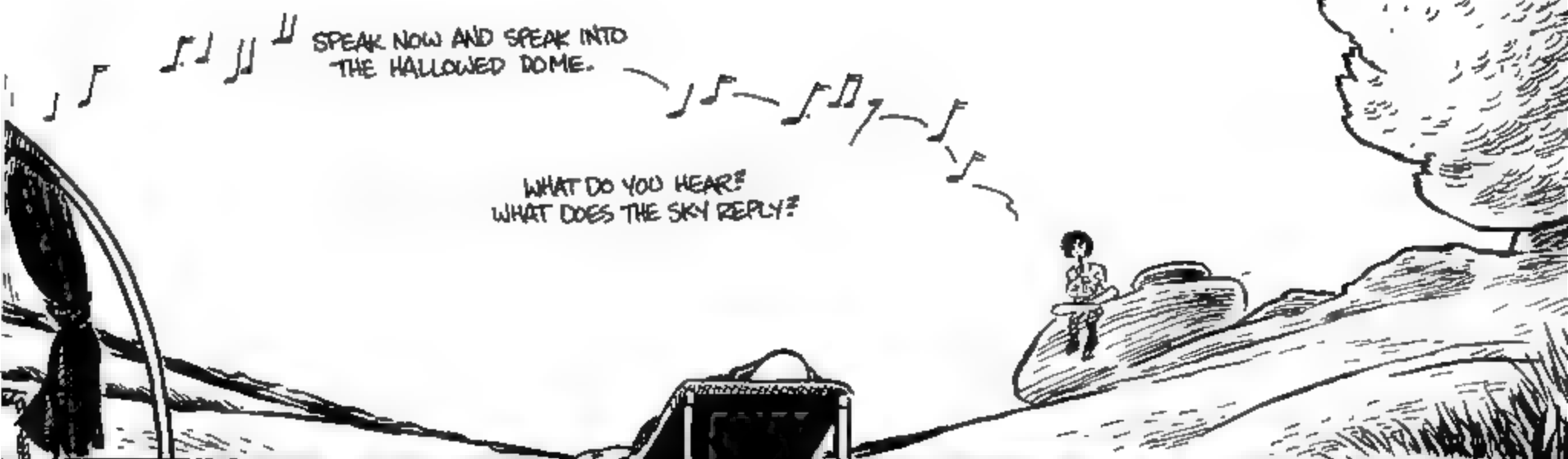






(C)

THE UNCONFINED.
THE TERMINUS OF PRAYER.





I WAS JUST PLAYING THAT TUNE SHAR'S ALWAYS WHISTLING

IT WAS ORIGINALLY A POEM TITLED "TRAVELOGUE FOR EXILES." IT WAS ADAPTED TO THE RANT FORM AND SET TO THAT PIECE OF MUSIC BY MANDACHUYA OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

IT ISN'T USUALLY SO BRIGHT. THAT'S YOU, CHANGING THE METER.



YOU DO PLAY THOSE LITONYAK TREBLE TRILLS RATHER WELL, CONSIDERING.

WELL, I OUGHT TO! YEARS UNDER THE SOUREST MONK YOU EVER SAW! HE SMILED AT ME ALL OF ONCE, AND EVEN THEN I WISHED I'D HAD A RULER TO MEASURE HIS LIPS WITH TO MAKE SURE!



MONK, WHAT MONK? WHAT ARE YOU GIBBERING ABOUT? WHERE WOULD YOU HAVE MET A LITONYAK MONK?

WELL, UH... IN A LITONYAK TEMPLE?

IMPOSSIBLE. NO TOURIST WOULD BE INSTRUCTED IN TEMPLE. THEY'RE QUITE CLOISTERED.



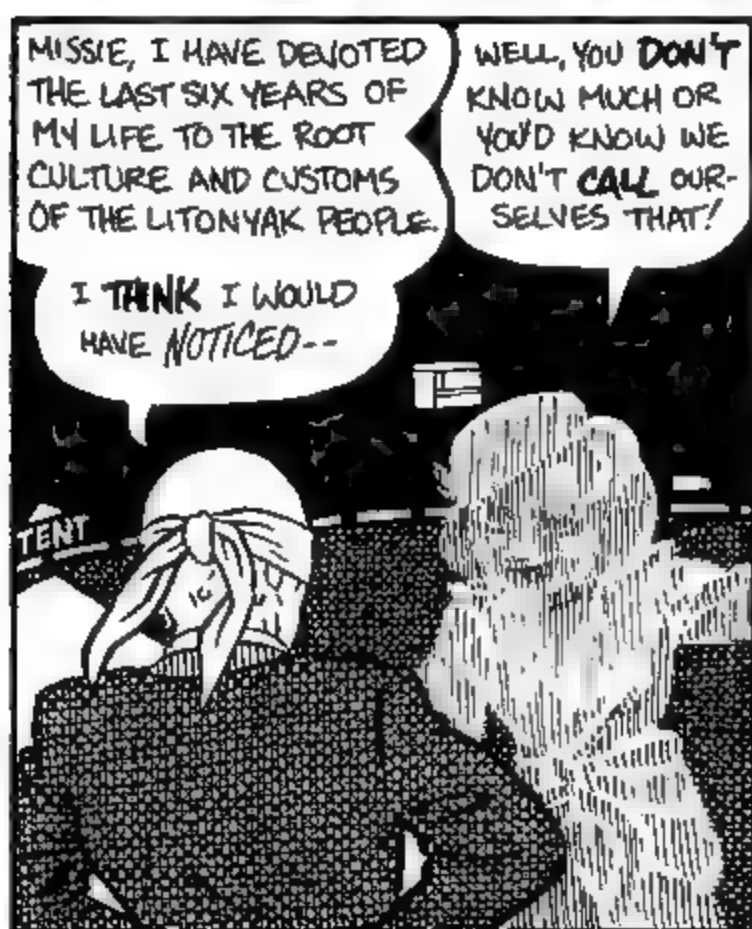
MY DEAR, IF YOU HAD ANY IDEA OF THE OBSTACLES SET AGAINST A WORKING ANTHROPOLOGIST-- WHY, EVEN TRAVELING TO THAT AREA, OFFICIALLY--

I WASN'T A TOURIST!

--THE RED TAPE IS-- WHAT?

I'M-- I'M, UH... WELL, I GUESS I'M LITONYAK.

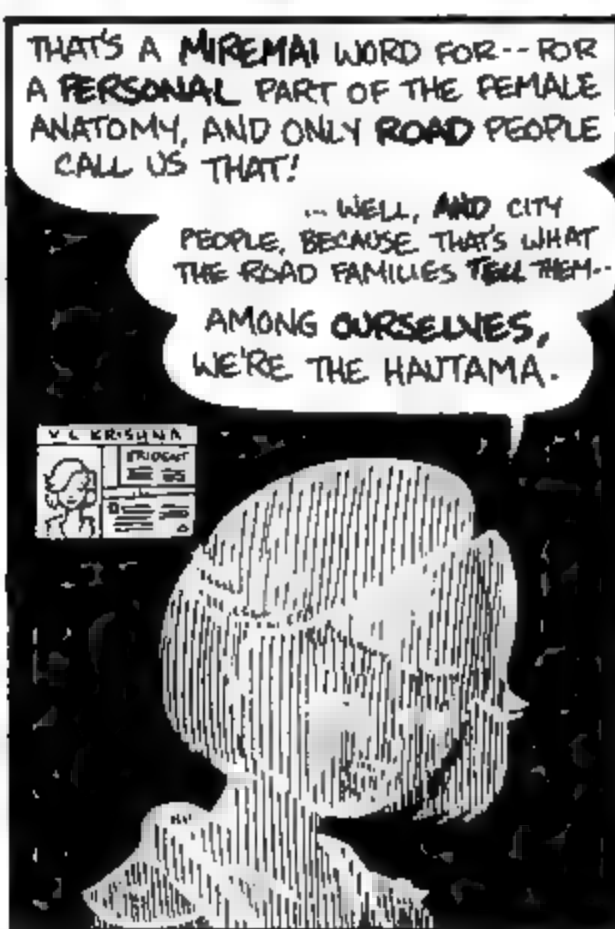
DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT?



MISSIE, I HAVE DEVOTED THE LAST SIX YEARS OF MY LIFE TO THE ROOT CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF THE LITONYAK PEOPLE.

WELL, YOU DON'T KNOW MUCH OR YOU'D KNOW WE DON'T CALL OURSELVES THAT!

I THINK I WOULD HAVE NOTICED--



THAT'S A MIREMAI WORD FOR-- FOR A PERSONAL PART OF THE FEMALE ANATOMY, AND ONLY ROAD PEOPLE CALL US THAT!

--WELL, AND CITY PEOPLE, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THE ROAD FAMILIES TELL THEM--

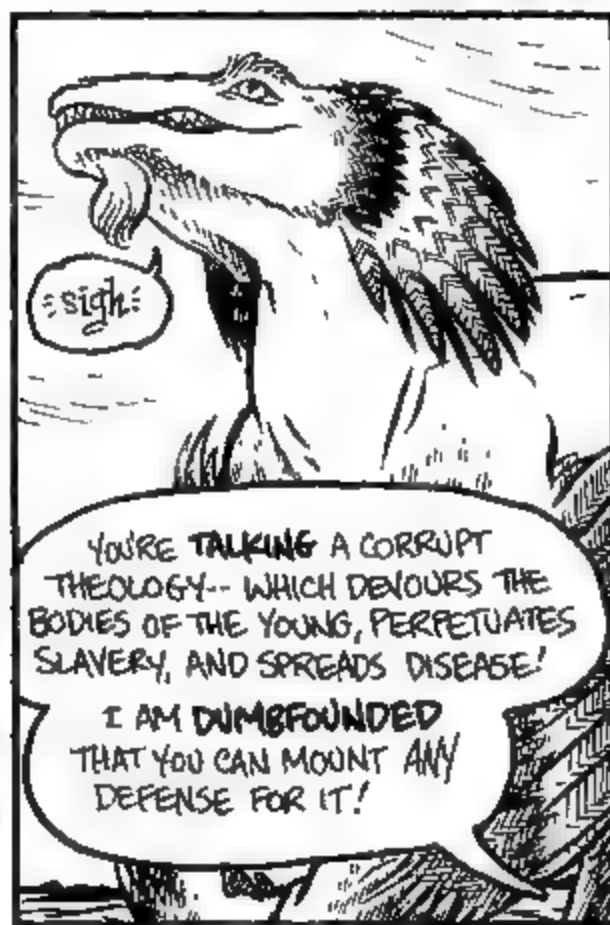
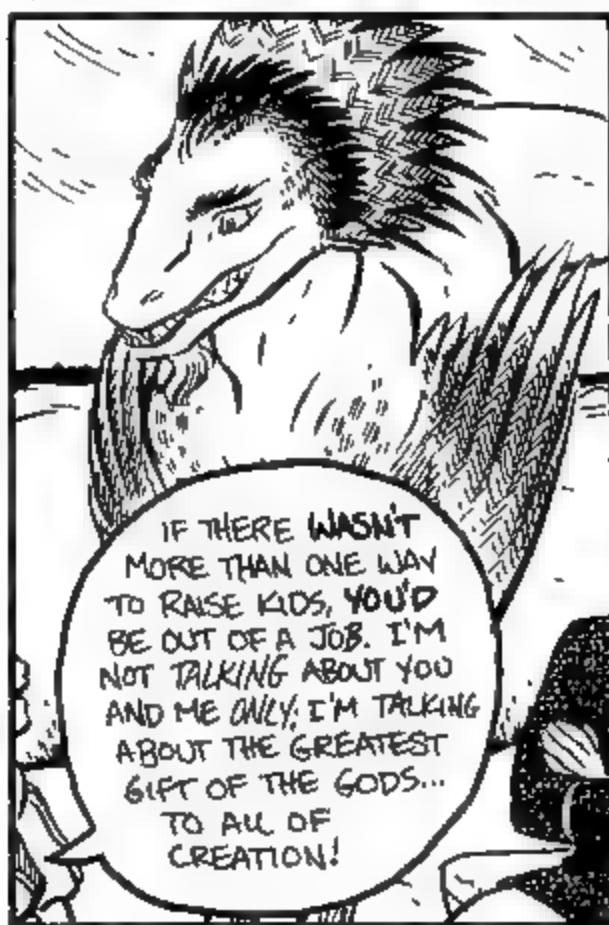
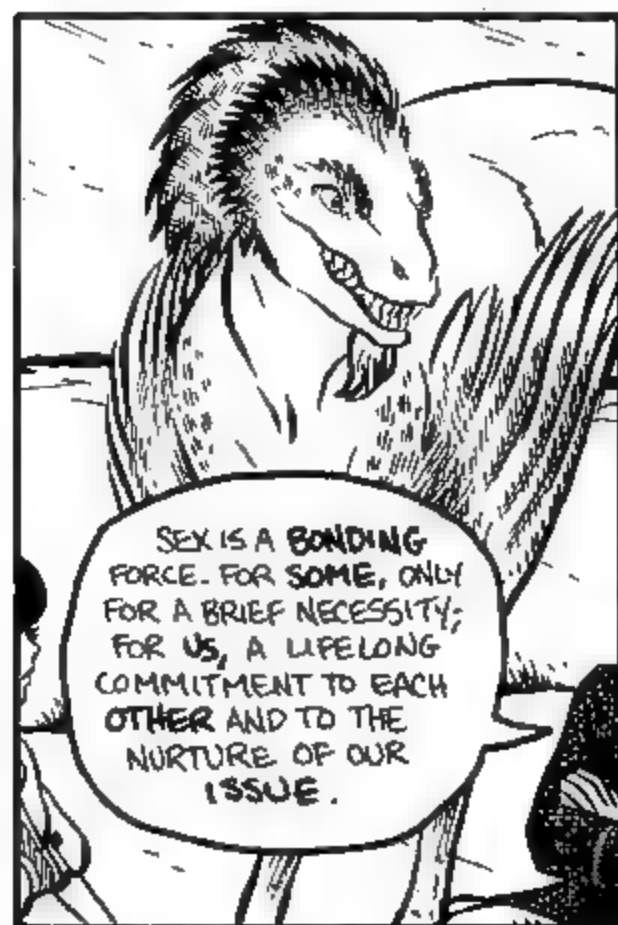
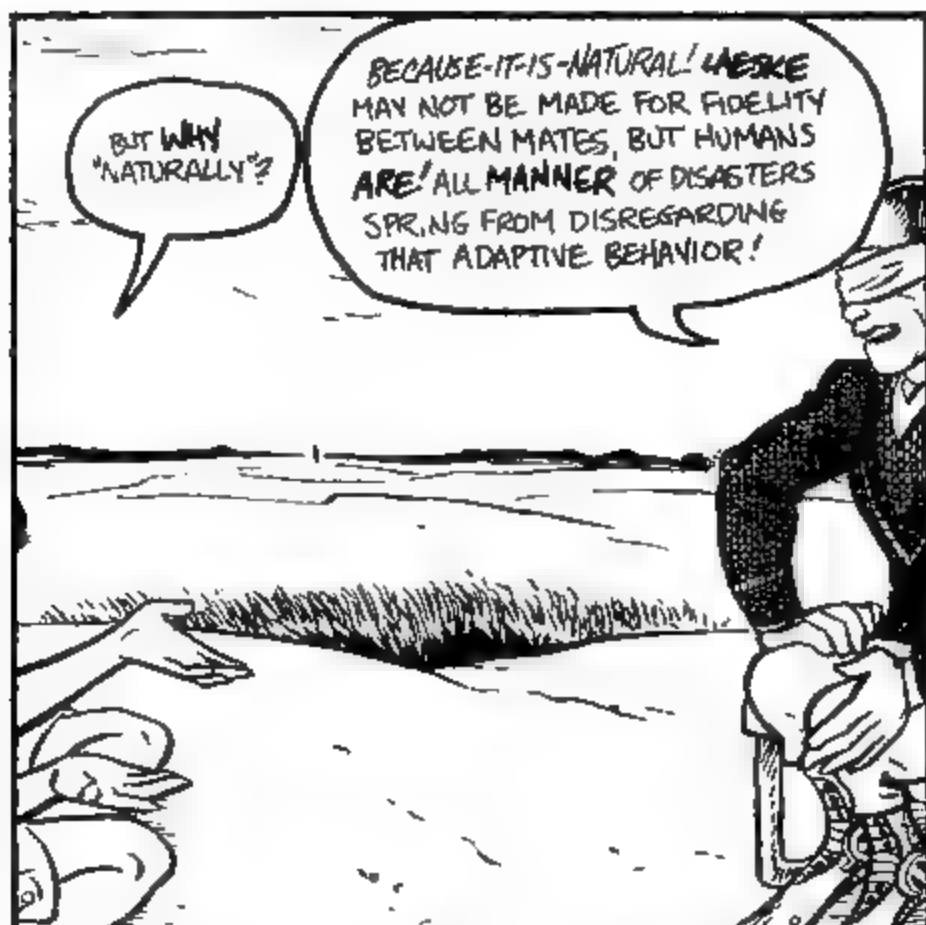
AMONG OURSELVES, WE'RE THE HANTAMA.



IMPOSSIBLE.







WHY I'M JUST
FINE, THANKS
SHO MUCH
FOR
ASKING!



SHAR!!
IT'S YOU!
YOU'VE STILL
GOT ALL YOUR
PRETTY
FEATHERS!

WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT HAPPENED?
WHAT HAPPENS NOW??



NOW?

WE GHEP PACKED UP!
IFF WE HURRRY, WE CAN
SHILL GET MIDTERM
PAPERSH GRRADED
ON TIME--

WHATE? YOU MEAN
IT'S OVER? YOU
ALREADY--

PAKIN
FRACKEN
BRUNGA
GRR--



AH YESH, THREE CHARMING MATRONS
WILL BE CARRYING ON THE HEXO HOLO!
LINE.

I
MISSED
IT!

YOU SSAW THE FUN PART.
THE ACTUAL FERTILIZATION
ISSN'T MUCH FUN-- MORE
LIKE A SHNEEZING FIT.

AND WHO SAYS ANYTHING
ABOUT YOU OR ME? THERE'S
NO "AND" IN THAT EQUATION.
I ASSURE YOU--

CAN'T BELIEVE
I MISSED IT..



SO WE WENT HOME, ESCORTED PART OF THE WAY
BY ARMED GUARDS, WHO SANG SONGS TO US FROM
HILLTOPS, SALUTING US WITH LONG PLUMES OF
BLUE, RED, GOLD, PURPLE, AND BLACK.

SINCE THEN, THERE HAS BEEN BETWEEN
DR. ZIVANCEVIC AND ME ANOTHER KIND OF
ARMED TRUCE. I TELL HIM HE DOESN'T KNOW
SHIT ABOUT WHERE I COME FROM AND HE
TELLS ME THAT I DON'T.

HE'S PUBLISHED THREE VERY WELL-RECEIVED
BOOKS ABOUT US AND ALL I GET IS PHOTO CREDIT.

BUT HIS CELEBRITY KEEPS THE UNIVERSITY
BEARDS OFF OUR BACKS OVER SHAR'S "HERETICAL"
THEORIES AND MY "IMPROPER" RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE TWO OF 'EM. HARUMF!

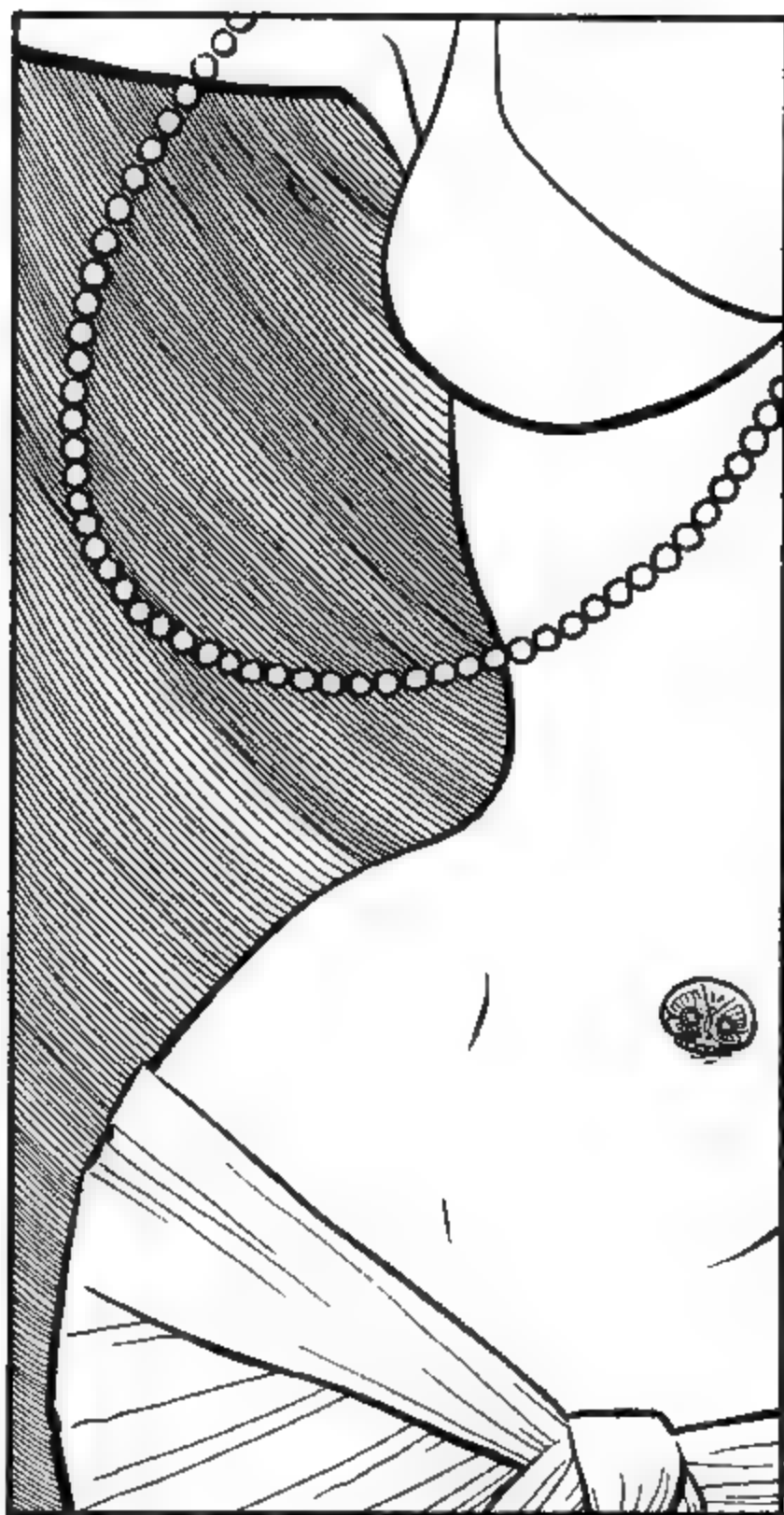
THINGS BALANCE OUT, AND THE CENTER HOLDS.

-- V. L. S. KRISHNA, DIARY EXCERPT
"LIFE OF ABBASS ADLER ZIVANCEVIC"





• *part three.*

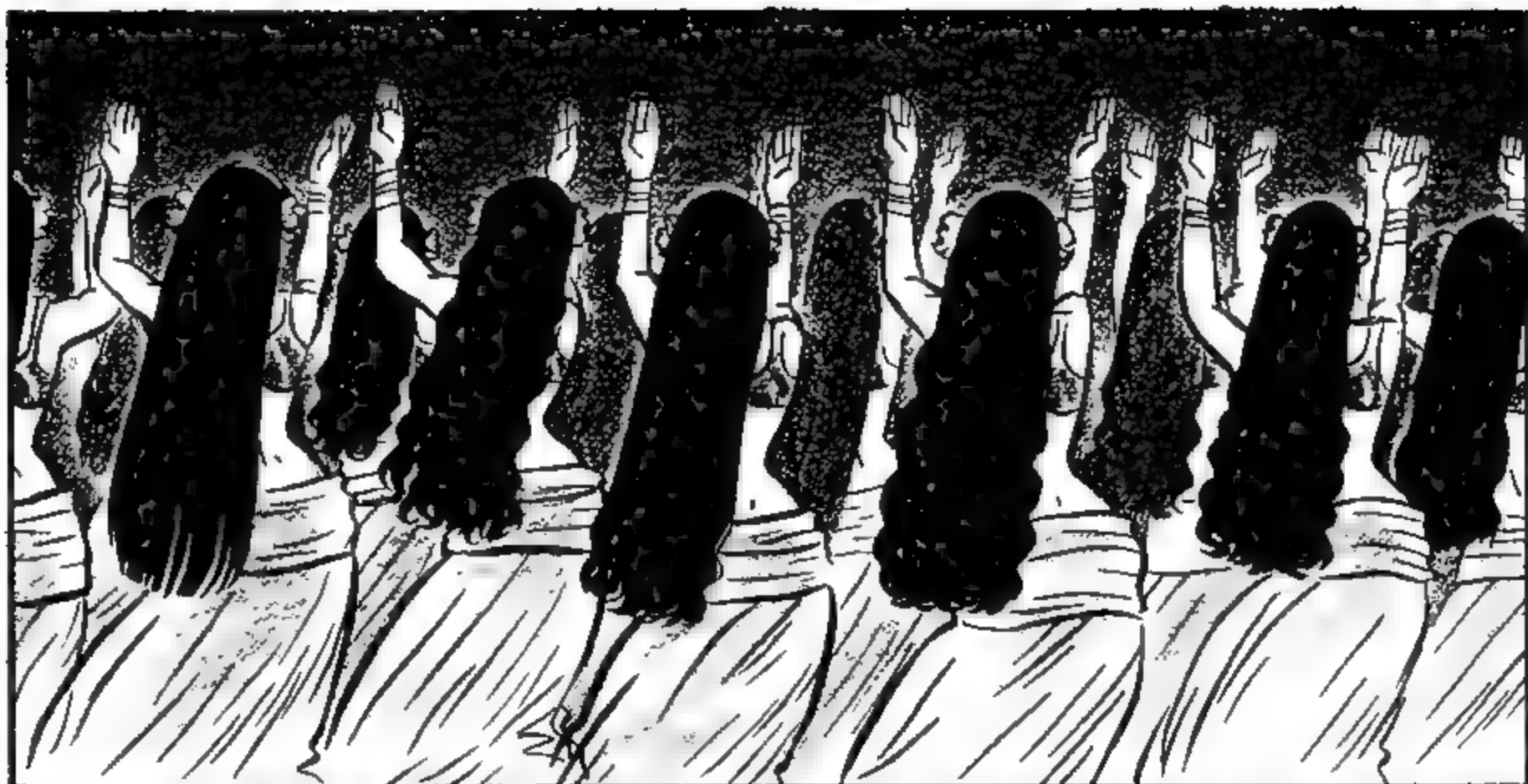


dance steps

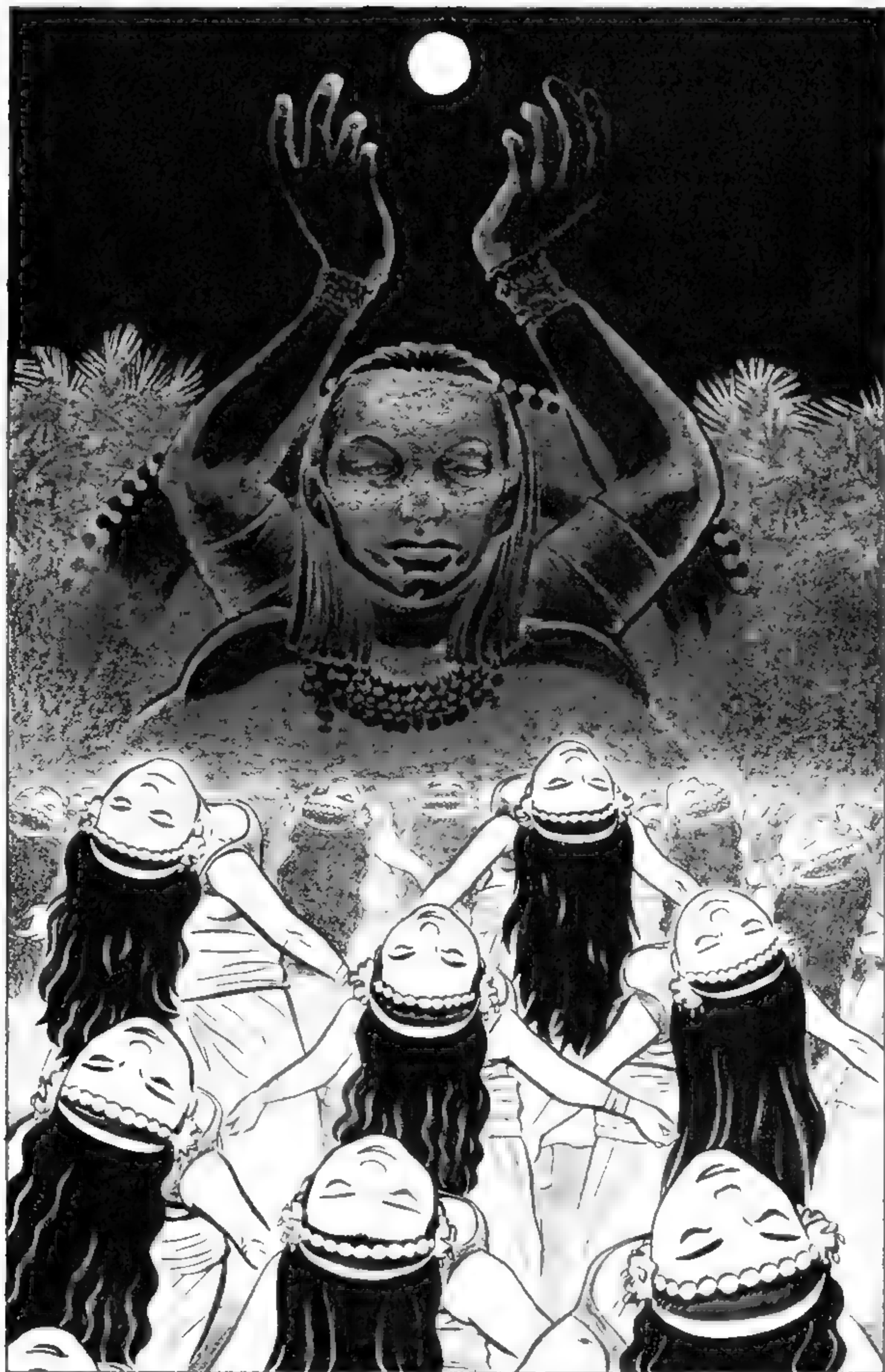




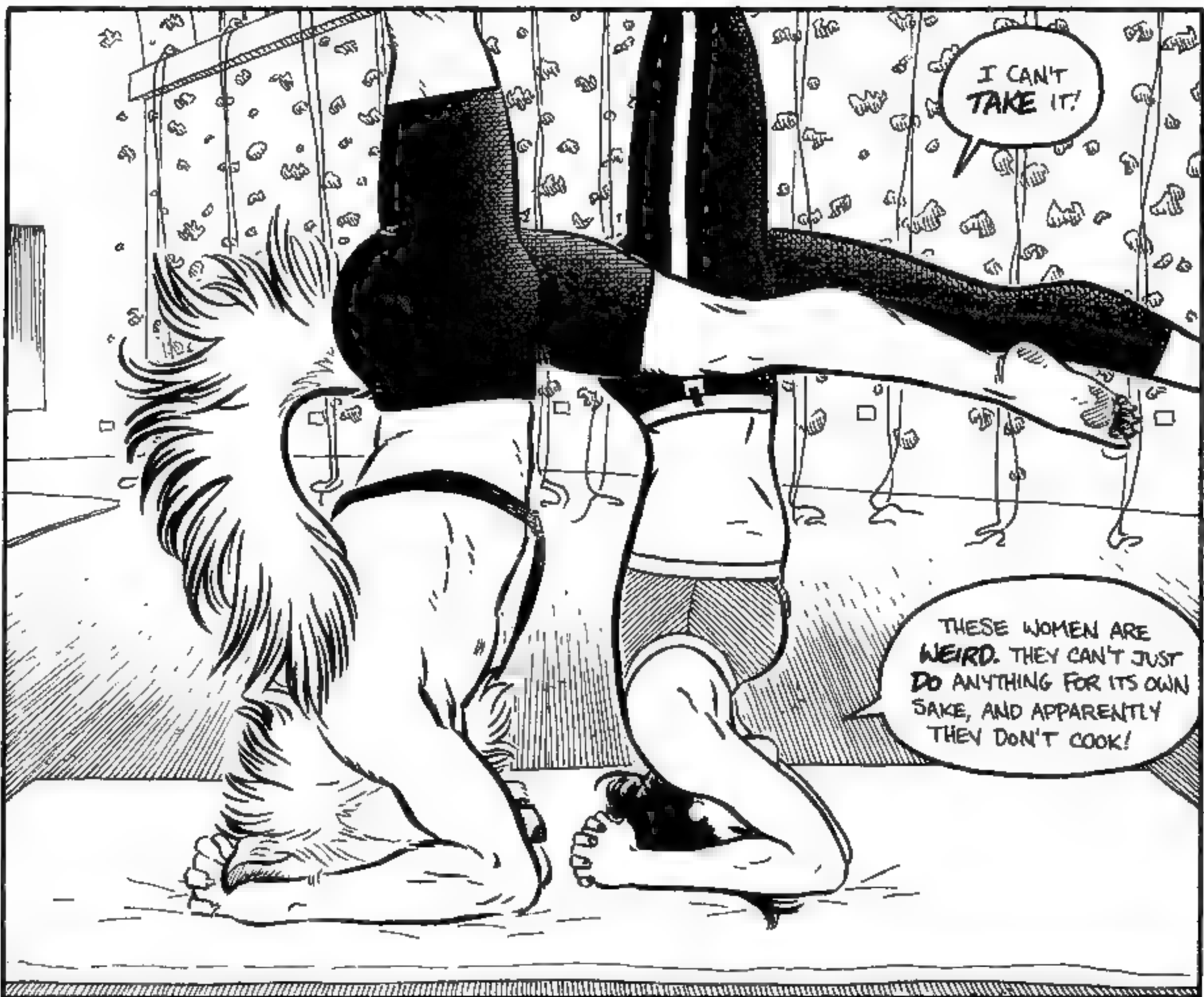
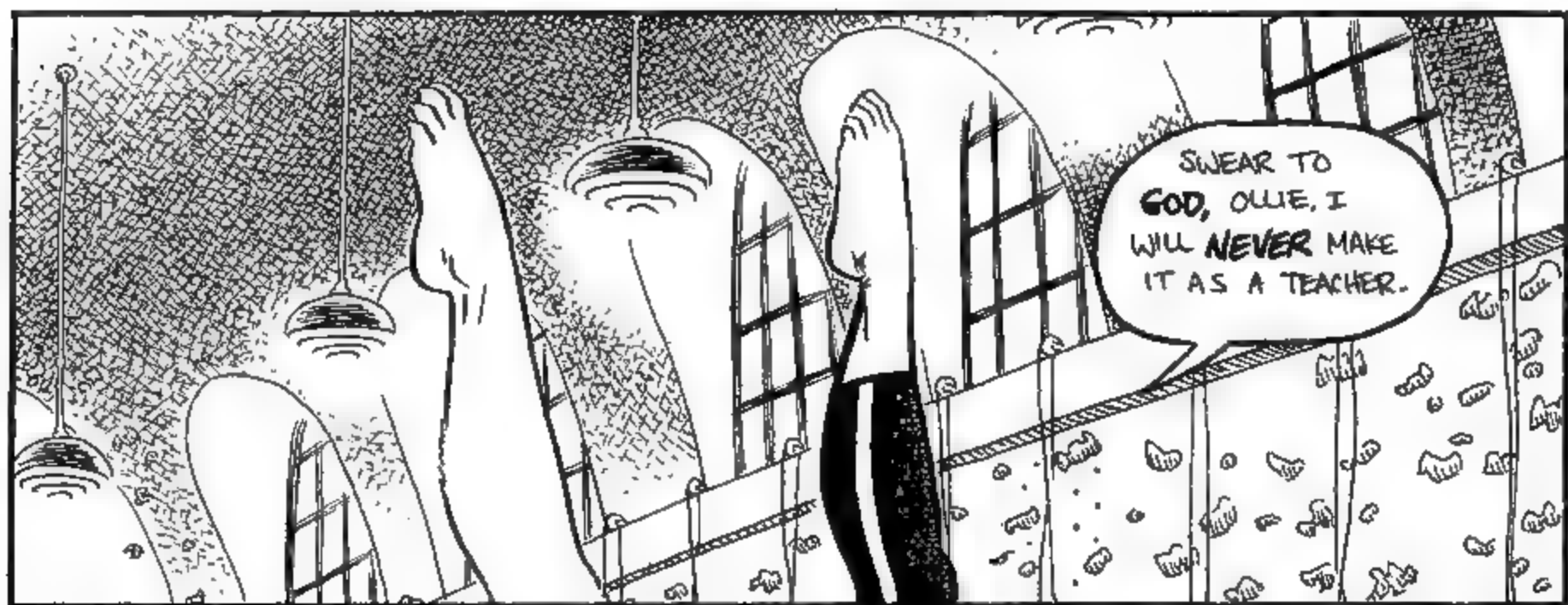


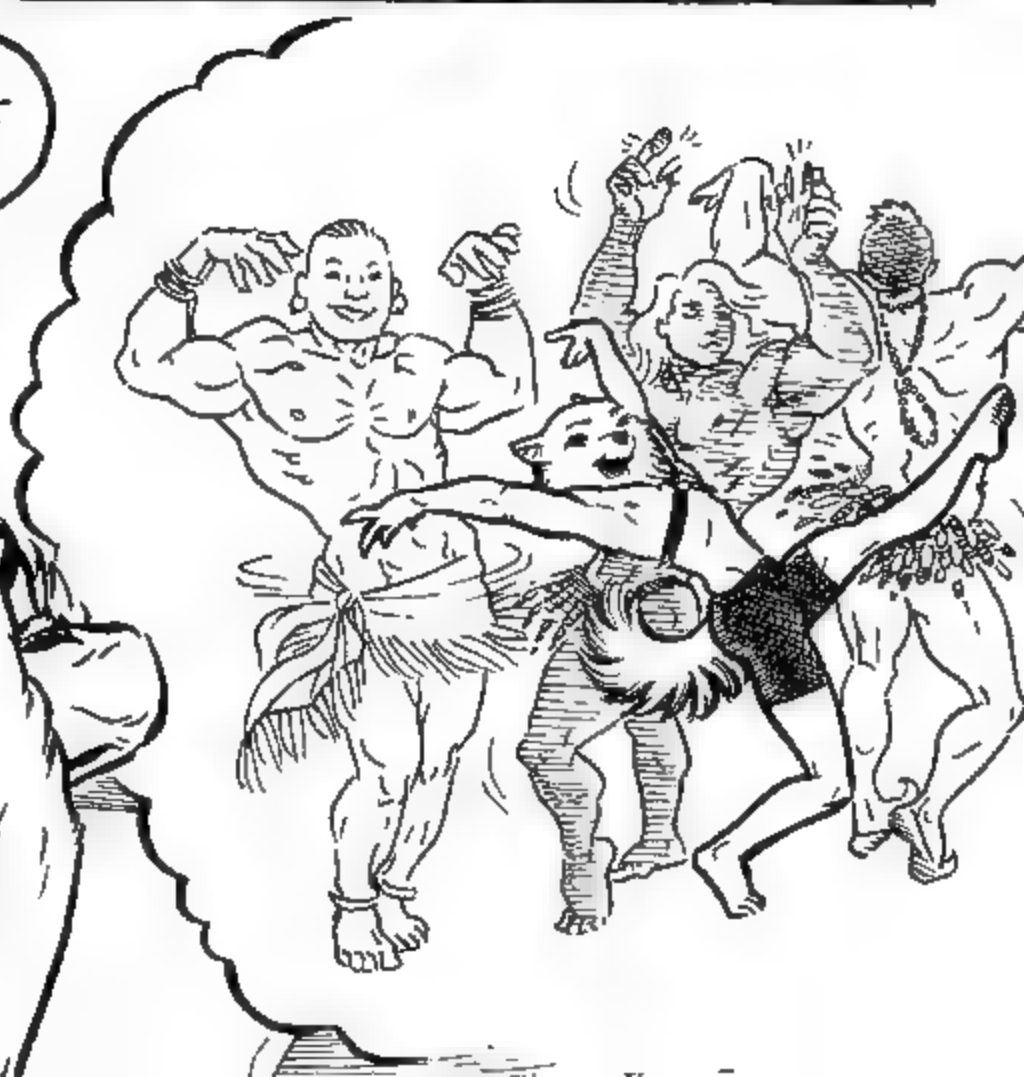
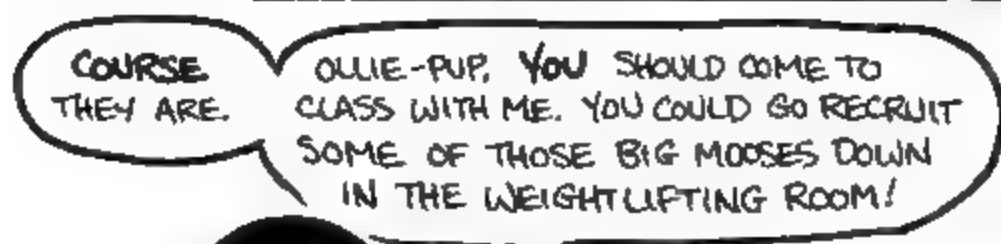
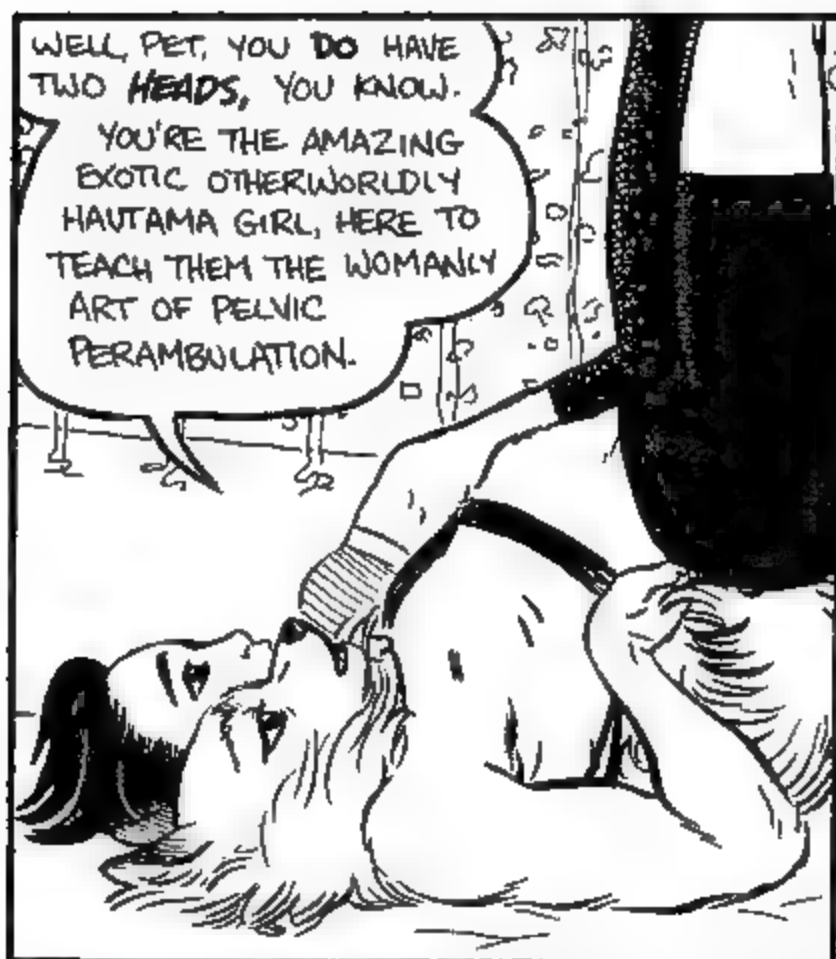


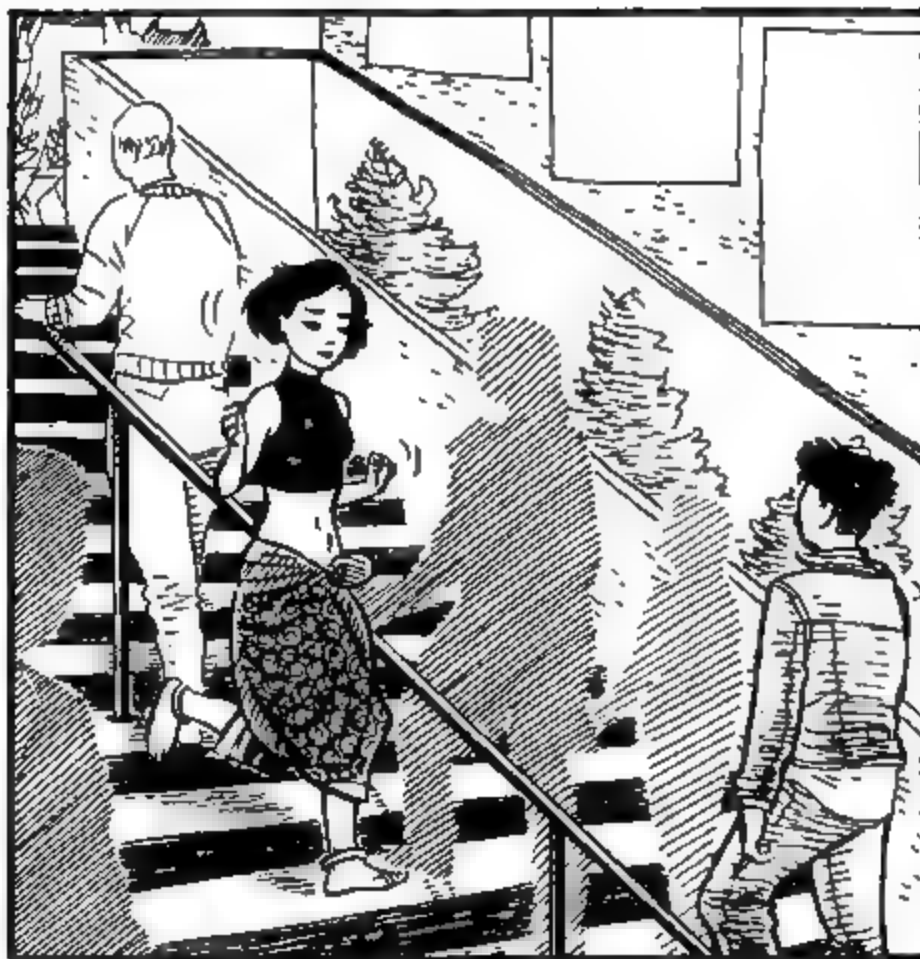


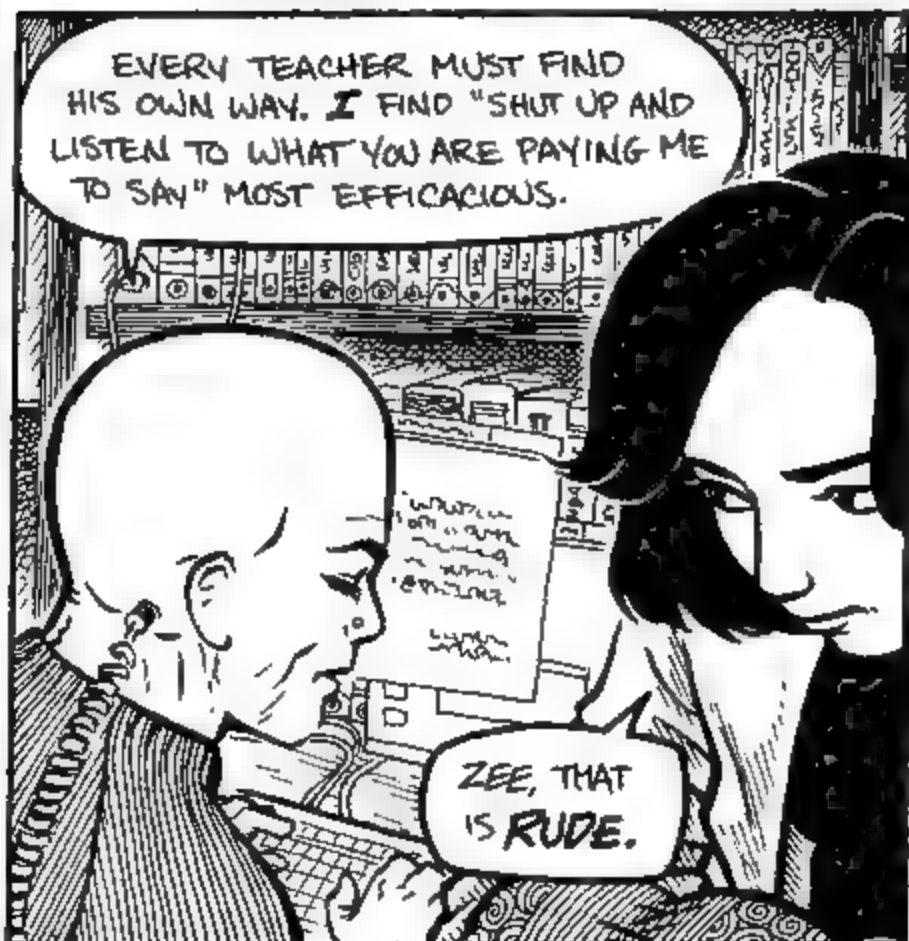
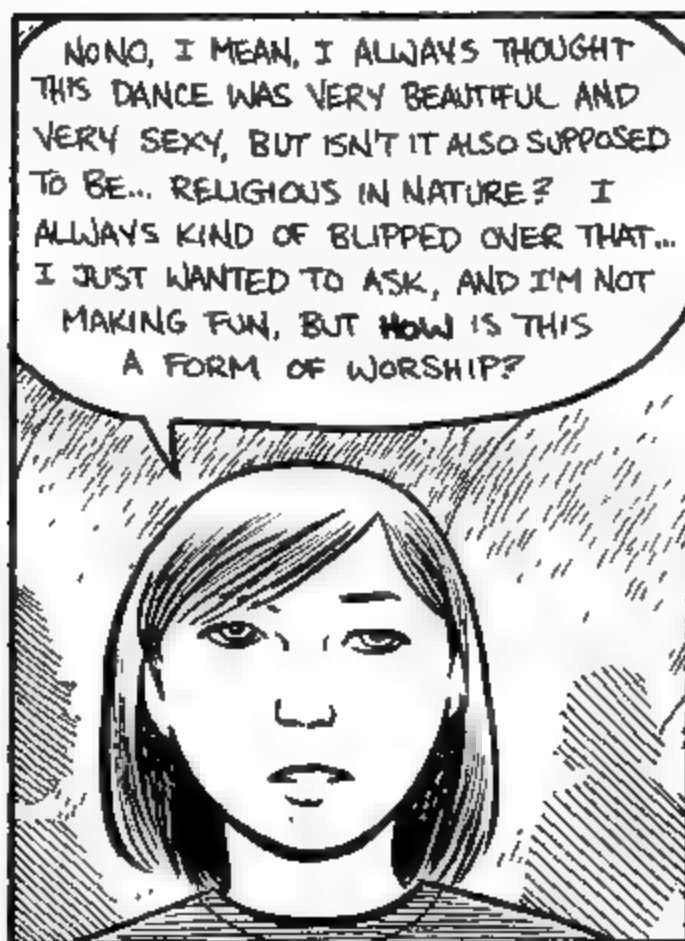
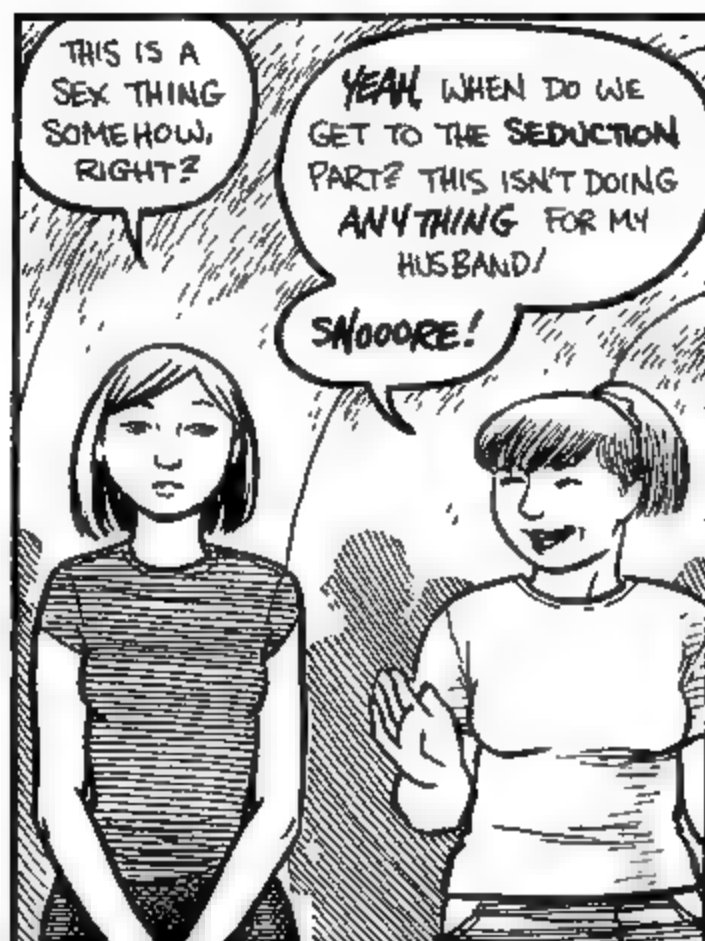


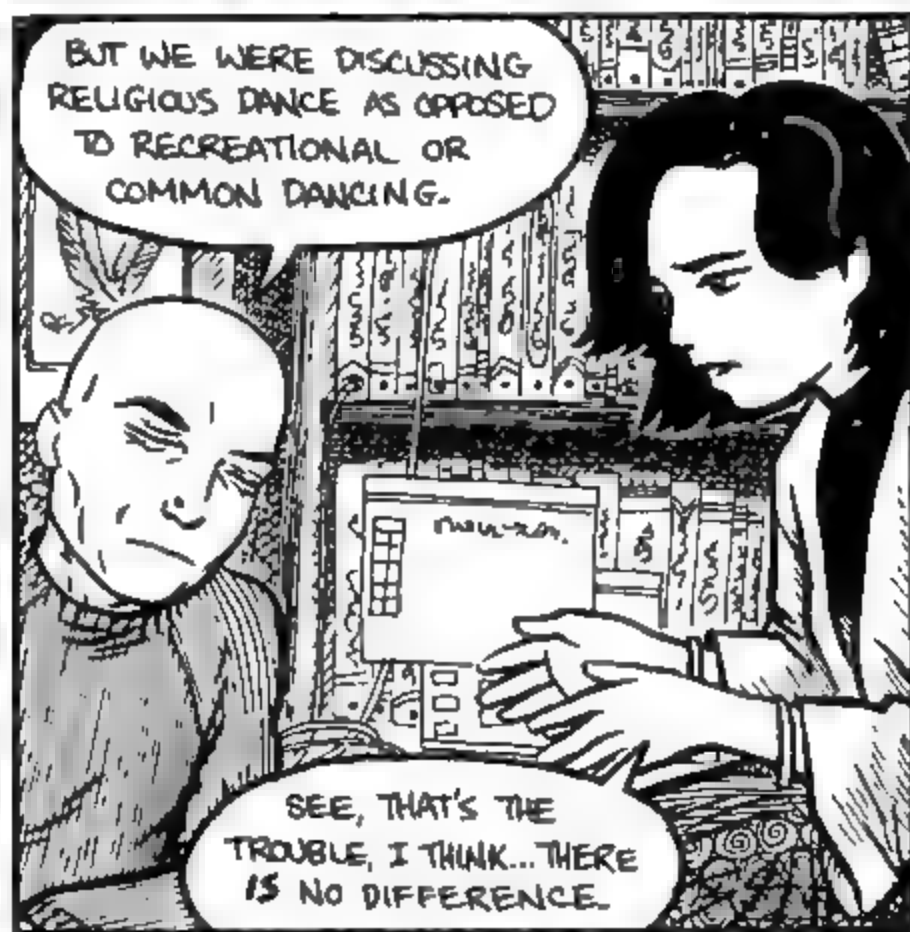
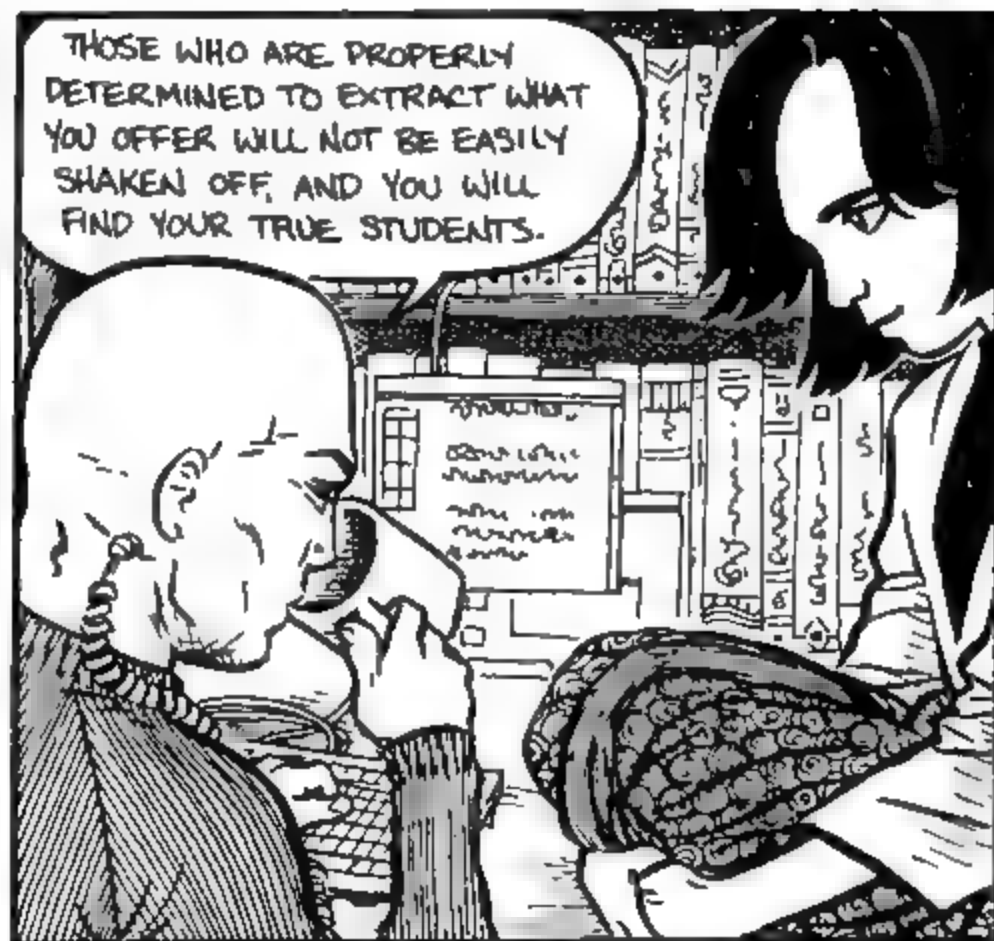
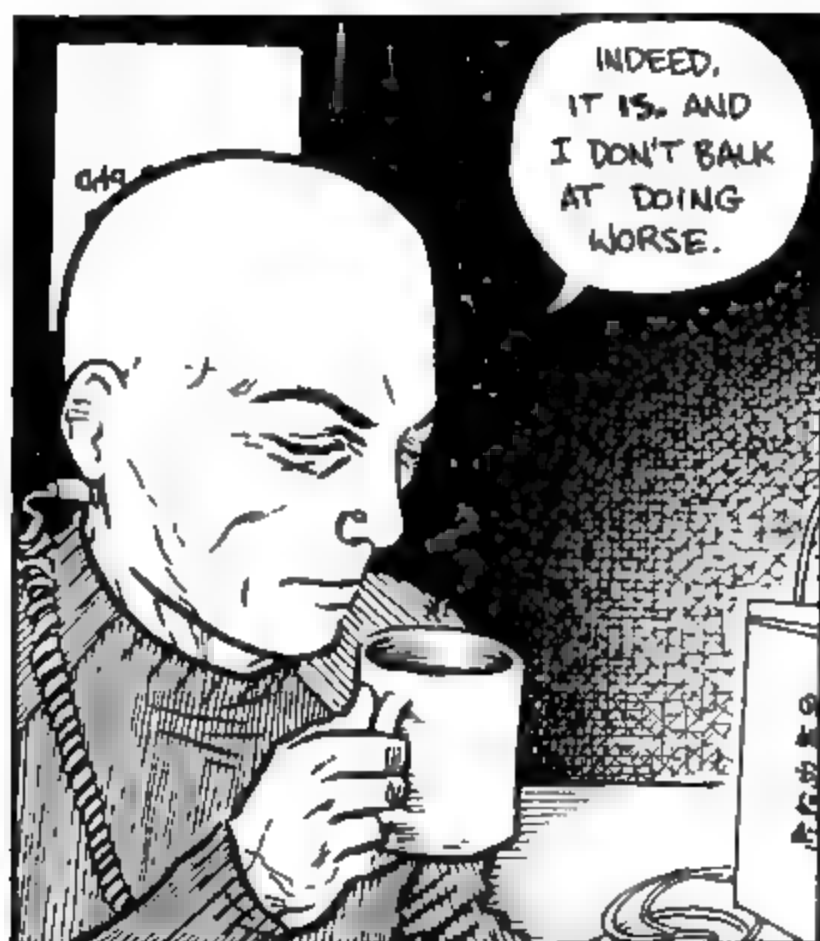
















WELL,
YES, THEM
TOO.



BUT GODS ARE A
LOT LIKE ROCK STARS.
THEY LIKE A NICE DINNER
AND A LITTLE DANCING
WITHOUT EVERYBODY
PESTERING THEM.

THEY LIKE PARTIES.
THEY LIKE TURNING UP
UNEXPECTEDLY. SO WE
DANCE FOR THEM AT
SPECIAL TIMES, BUT WE
DANCE FOR THE COMMON
DEAD ALL THE TIME.

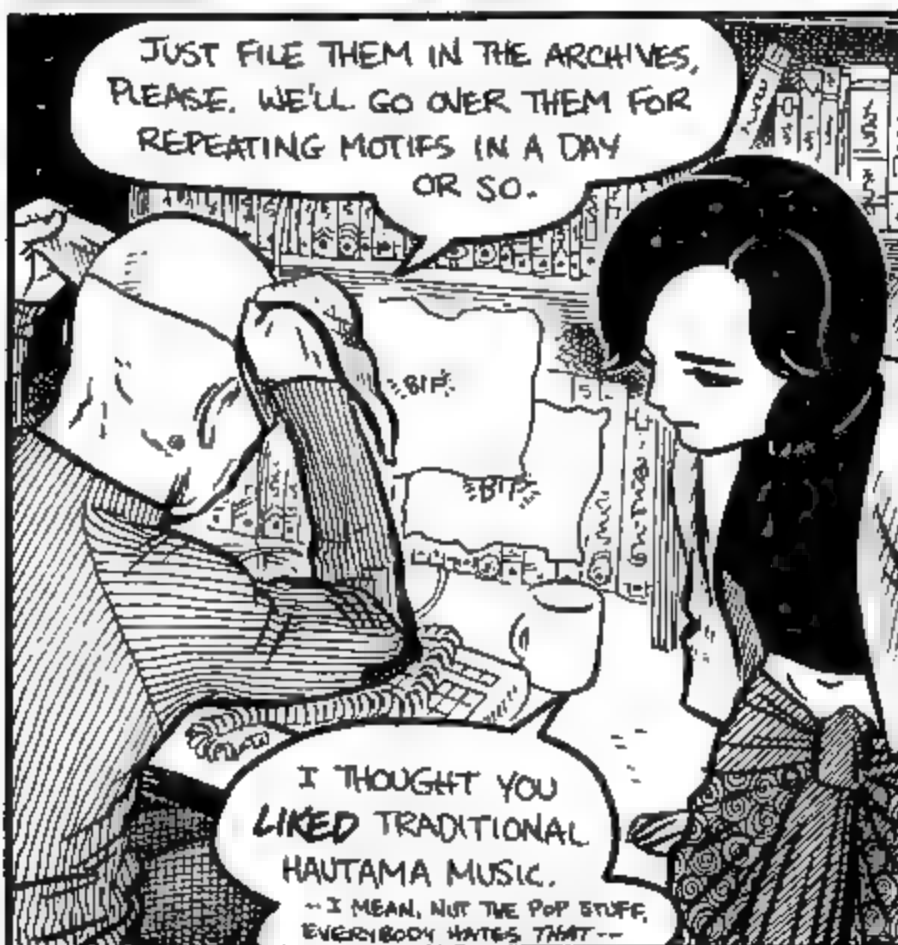


..INTERESTING.



OH-- I HAVE A FILE OF GOOD LOCAL
RECORDINGS OF TAKAI MUSIC. FAT SAM'S
REALLY GETTING GOOD. I COULD DROP
THEM AT YOUR PLACE AFTER CLASS...

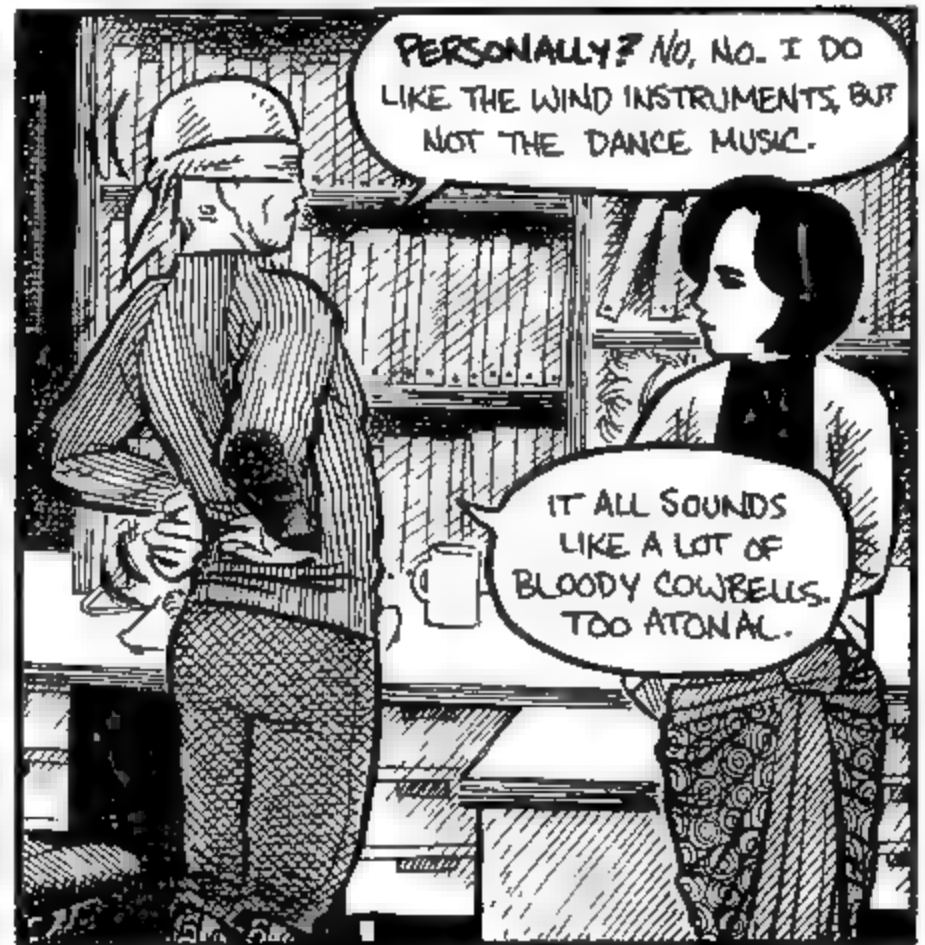
NO, NO
NEED.



JUST FILE THEM IN THE ARCHIVES,
PLEASE. WE'LL GO OVER THEM FOR
REPEATING MOTIFS IN A DAY
OR SO.

I THOUGHT YOU
LIKED TRADITIONAL
HAUTAMA MUSIC.

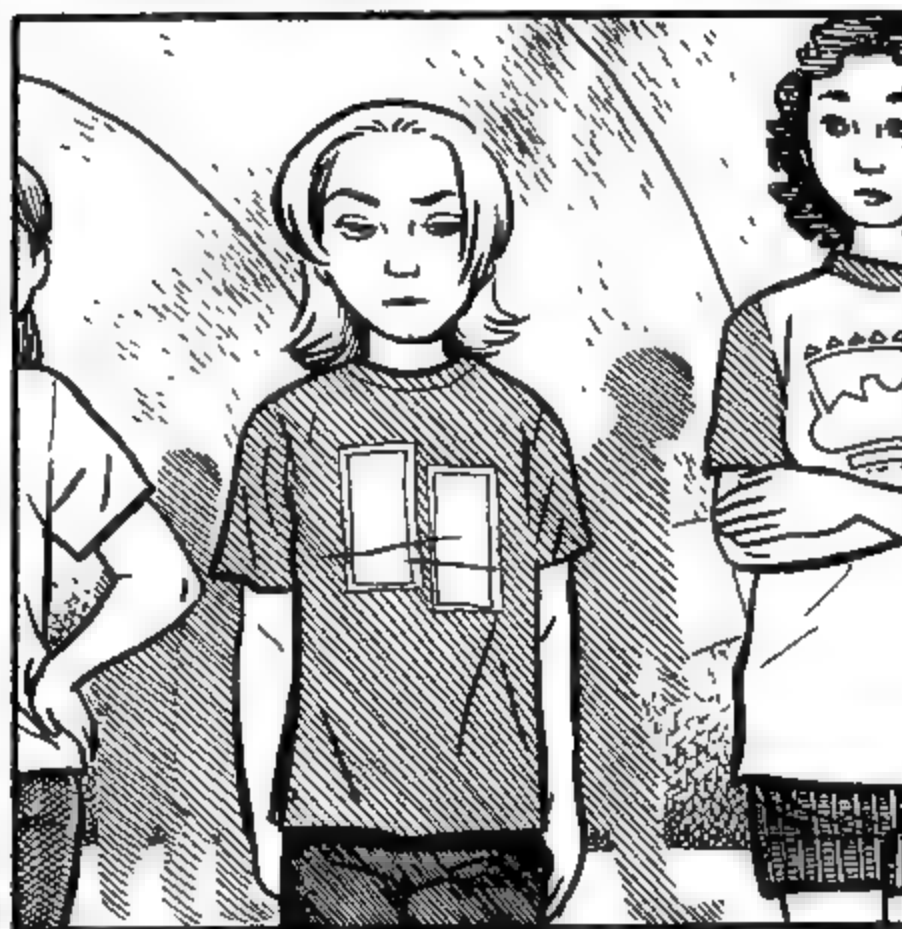
-- I MEAN, NOT THE POP STUFF,
EVERYBODY HATES THAT --

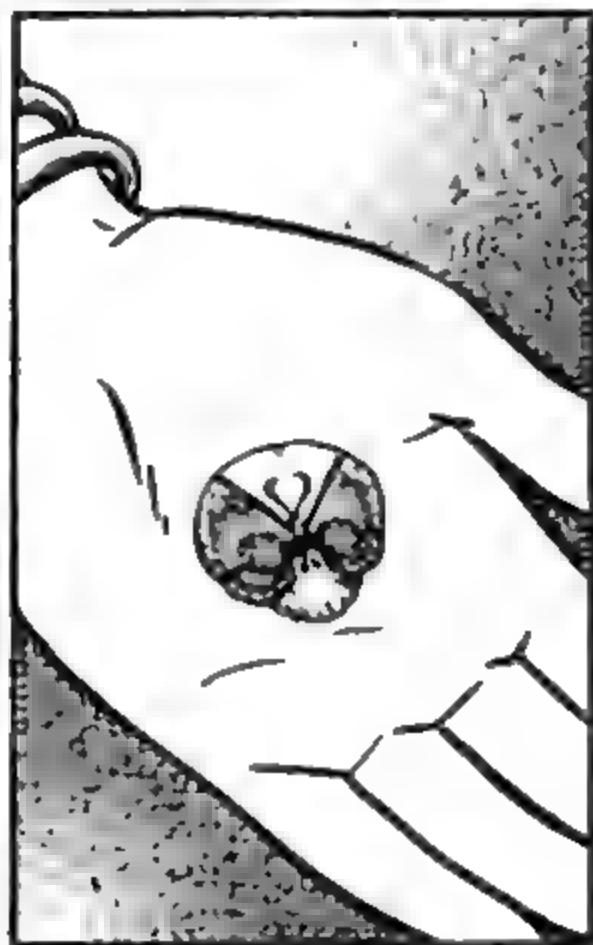


PERSONALLY? NO, NO. I DO
LIKE THE WIND INSTRUMENTS, BUT
NOT THE DANCE MUSIC.

IT ALL SOUNDS
LIKE A LOT OF
BLOODY COWBELLS.
TOO ATONAL.







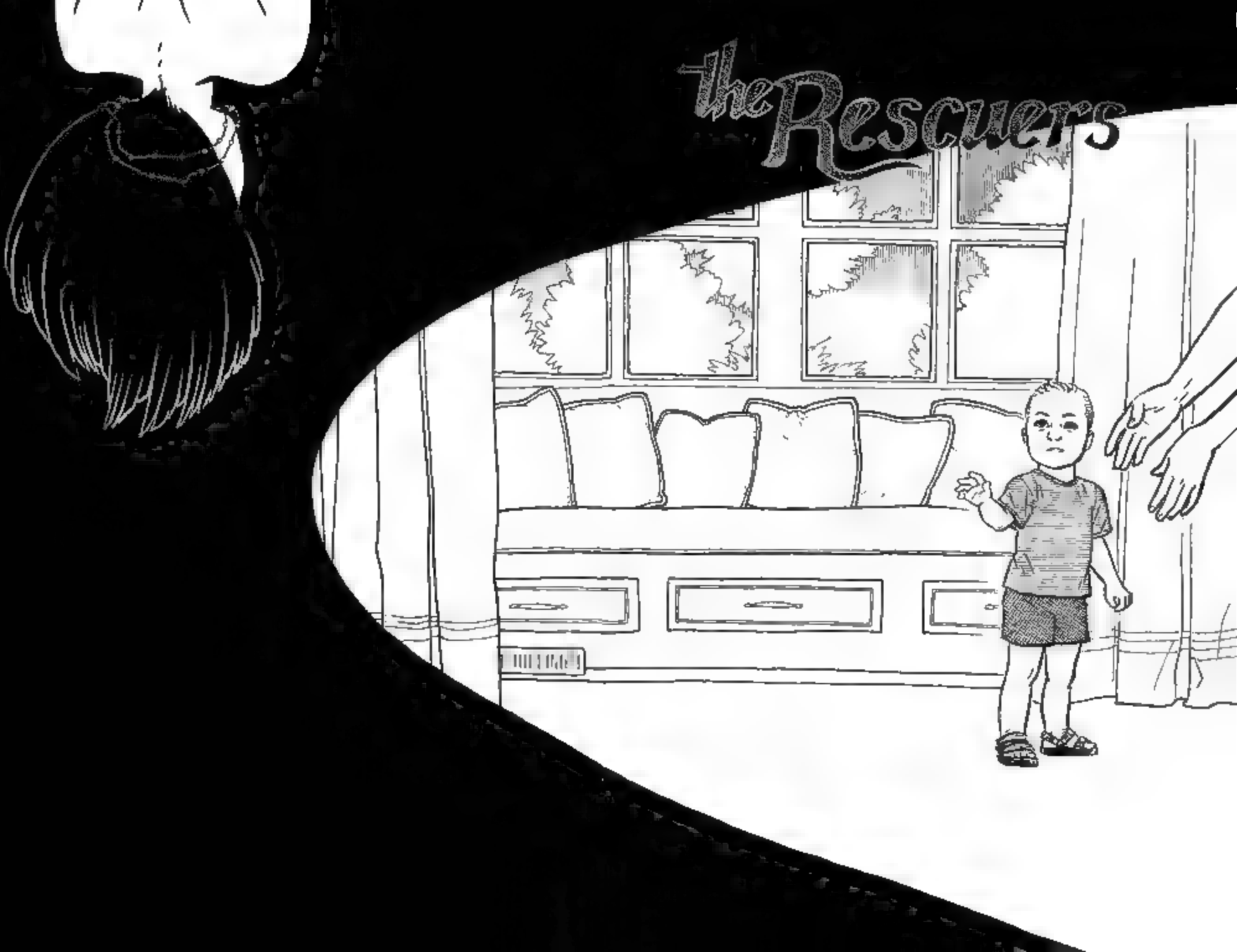








The Rescuers





LADY ETHANY
FASHION DESIGNER



JAHOSA
ASCIAN HOLY MAN



JOHNNY LOCKRUM
BARON'S SON



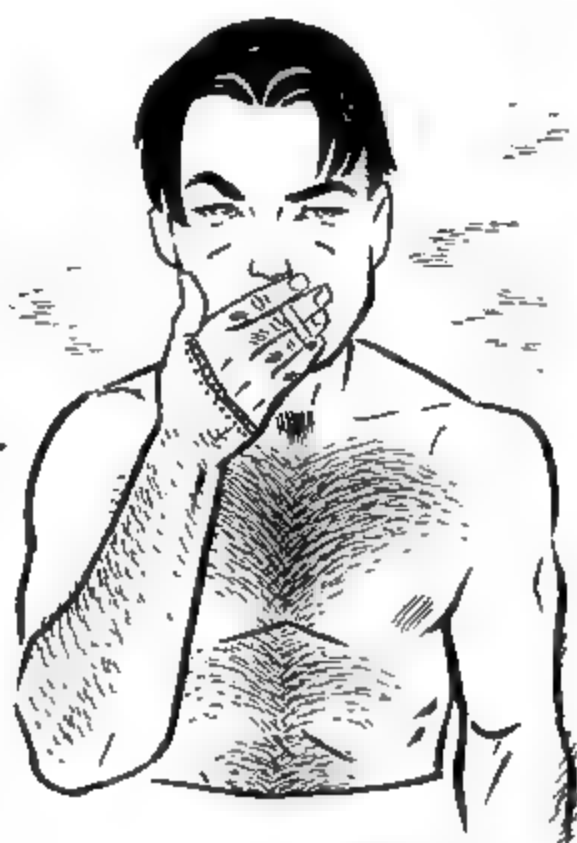
GEORGE LOCKRUM
BARON MANAVELIN



SMITHSON
POLICE DETECTIVE



NEN
ASCIAN MIDWIFE



JAEGER
FINDER



LOHENA
EXPECTANT MOTHER



TWINS
ASCIAN TABOO



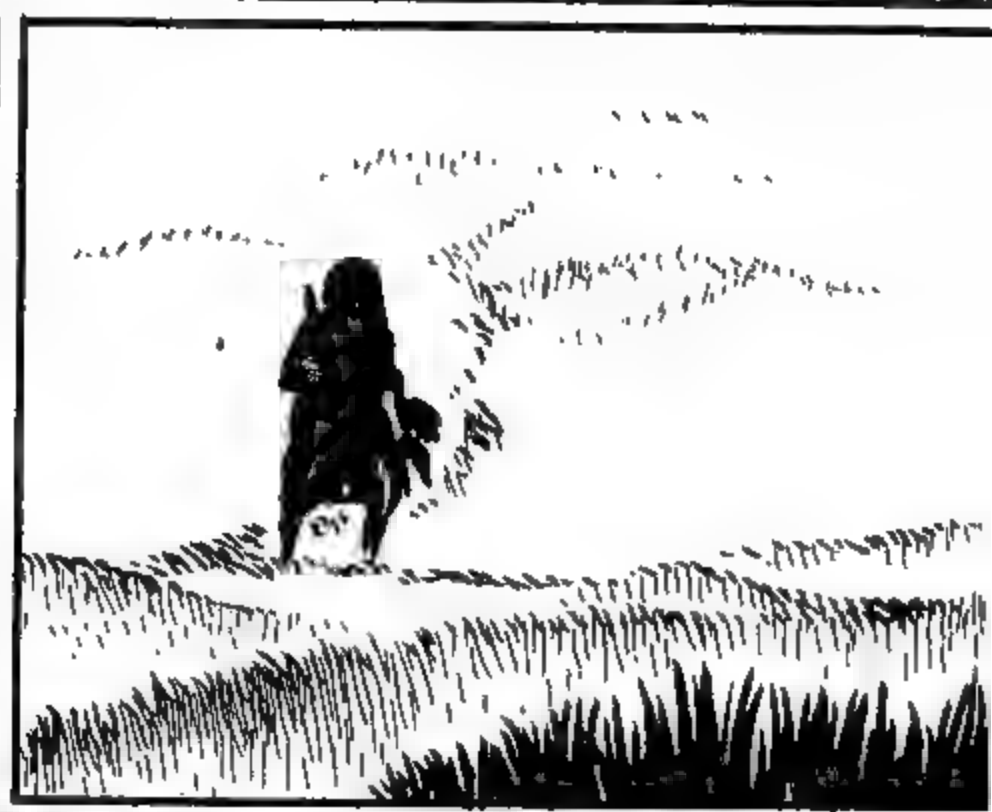
LYDIA
KITCHEN MAID



FLORESCA DESUSA
BARON'S HEAD COOK

prologue







GOOD
LAD!

WHAT
YOU GOT?



BUNCHA
DUNGEATERS,
THAT'S ALL.

FIGURED I'D
GIVE 'EM TO

WHAT?



THOSE ARE JUST TRASH BIRDS! YOU'RE
TOO OLD TO BE HUNTING THOSE. WHAT'S
WRONG WITH YOU?

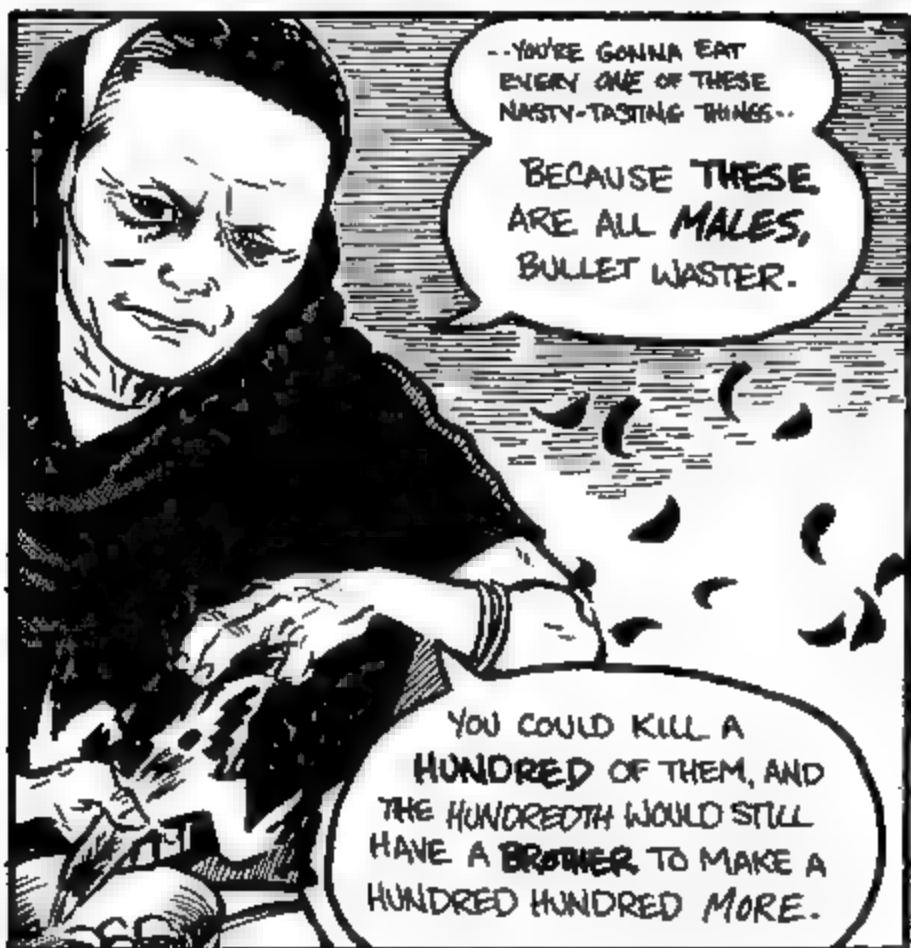
UNCLE SAID IT WAS GOOD TO KILL
THEM. BROOD PARASITES, AREN'T THEY? THEY
LAY THEIR EGGS IN GAME BIRDS' NESTS... THE DUNG-
EATER BABIES KILL THE GAME-BIRD BABIES...?



DON'T PUT THIS OFF ON
YOUR UNCLE. IT'S STILL A
WASTE OF COSTLY
BULLETS.

WHY?

IF THESE THINGS CAN RUIN
SIXTY NESTS A SEASON, THAT'S A
LOT OF GAME BIRDS WE WON'T HAVE..



--YOU'RE GONNA EAT
EVERY ONE OF THESE
NASTY-TASTING THINGS--

BECAUSE THESE
ARE ALL MALES,
BULLET WASTER.

YOU COULD KILL A
HUNDRED OF THEM, AND
THE HUNDREDTH WOULD STILL
HAVE A BROTHER TO MAKE A
HUNDRED HUNDRED MORE.



IF THERE ARE TOO MANY
OF ANYTHING, IT'S THE GIRLS
YOU HAVE TO KILL.

town
house.
country
house.





NONO, YOU
DON'T UNDERSTAND!
A BARON IS NOT
A PEER.

--SINCE HIS
MARRIAGE TO THE
FORMER MISS ETHAN
BRIGGS, THE COUPLE
HAVE REFUSED ALL
INTERVIEWS--

--PHOTO SHOTS
DONE BY IN-HOUSE
CAMERAMEN, NO
CANDIDS--

--THE MOST ADORED
NOBLES IN THE CITY, AND
THEY'VE DENIED THE
PUBLIC NEARLY
EVERYTHING--

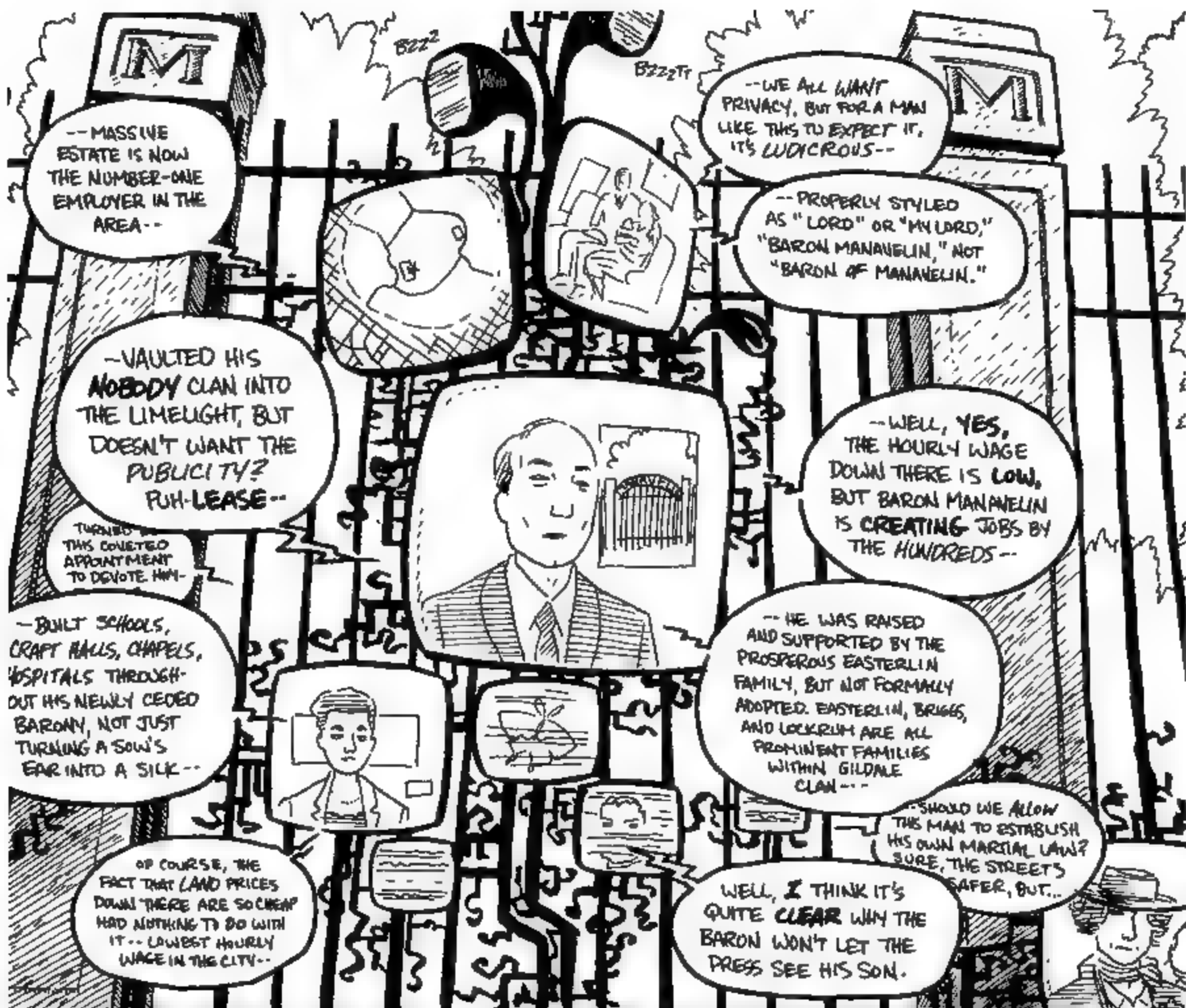
--HERO AND
PHILANTHROPIST
NOT WITHSTANDING,
WHAT ABOUT CELEBRITY?
THIS IS NOT A THING
ONE CAN BLITHELY
DISCARD--

- MOST
CAMERA-SHY PUBLIC
FIGURES OF ALL TIME!
ETHAN BRIGGS, OF
ALL PEOPLE, SHOULD
KNOW BETTER--

--RAZING OF
OVER A HUNDRED
MILES OF SEA-LEVEL
TERRITORY TO BUILD
MANAVELIN, THE
SUMPTUOUS NEW
ESTATE--

--BUT NO TOURS
OF THE GRAND NEW
MANOR HOUSE OR ITS
GROUNDS ARE BEING
OFFERED! IS THAT
FRIENDLY?

CONTROVERSY
REIGNS. WHY WON'T





LADY MANVELIN,
EVER A PATRON OF
HANDCRAFTING

IN ADDITION TO
ENDOWING SKILLED
GLAZIERS, JEWELERS,
WOOD CARVERS

NEW STYLES
DERIVED FROM
ASIAN
CRAFTS

CRUISED SIX
NEW SCENES FOR
TRADITIONAL DANCE
INCLUDING

HOSTED ON
GROUNDS OF THE
ESTATE



HERE!

HERE, YOU
BOYS, YOU STOP
AT THAT?

OUT HERE'S
PUBLIC PROPERTY!



ORDERS, MA'AM. WE'RE TO
KEEP THE KUDZU OFF OF THE
BARON'S OUTER WALL.

So!

WELL, YOU TELL
HIM FROM ME THAT IF
HE GOES AT THAT HE'S GOT TO
GET MORE STREET LIGHTS!



NOBODY'D PUT UP WITH THE
RACKET THOSE THINGS MAKE IF
THEY WASN'T HALF NEAR ONLY
SOURCE OF LIGHT DOWN HERE!

YES,
MA'AM.

YOU
TELL
HIM!

YES,
MA'AM.



TRADESMAN'S
ENTRANCE?

UGH!
UNDER THIS
MESS SOME-
WHERE.

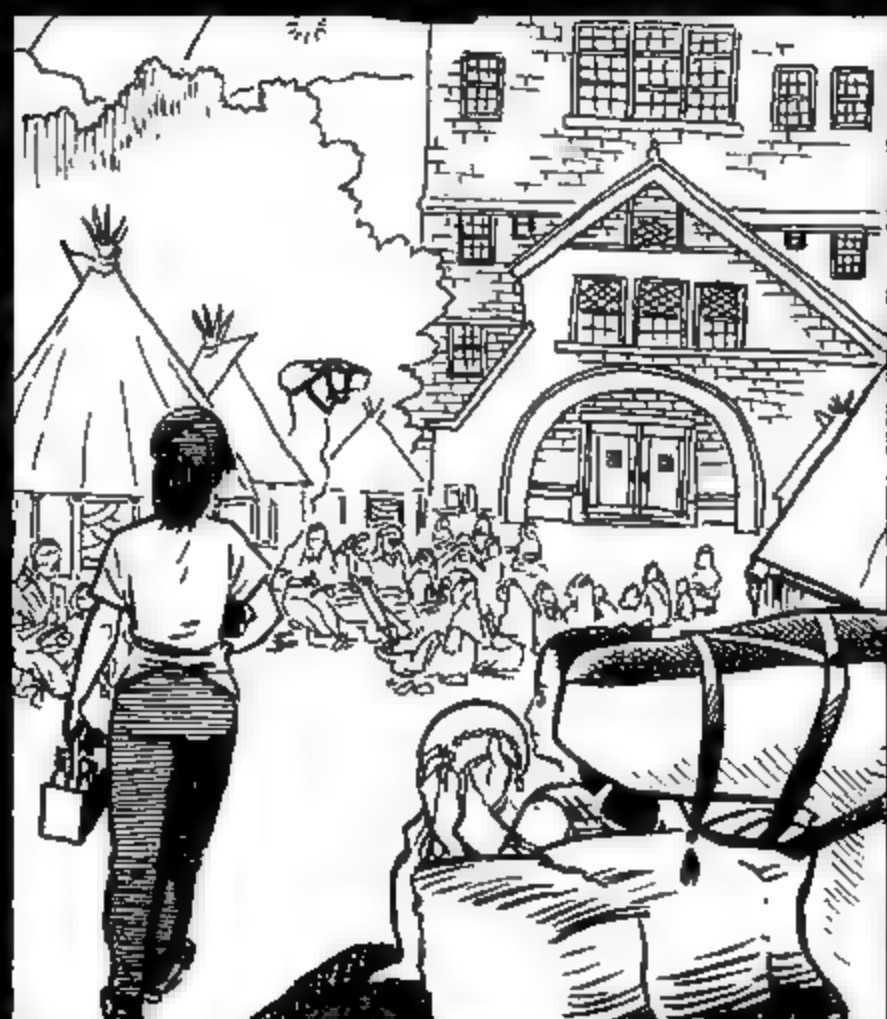


THAT'S
GOT IT.

YOUR BOSS WANTING
THIS STUFF? THAT'S GOOD-
QUALITY GOLD WIRE.

NAH, YOU
HAVE IT IF
YOU WANT.





GRONK
3

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE THESE??
THAT WOMAN IN THERE, SHE TRIED TO FEED
THE CHILDREN ANIMAL MILK!

OOH, SORRY,
COUSIN. I SHOULD
HAVE TOLD YOU. IT'S
IN A LOT OF THEIR
FOOD.

FAUGH! HOW
DISGUSTING!

I'M NOT TAKING ANYTHING
FROM THAT HEARTH AGAIN. THE MEN
CAN JUST GET US MEAT!

WHERE FROM?
WE'RE IN THE
MIDDLE OF THE
CITY.

I DON'T CARE! WHO
KNOWS WHAT ELSE MIGHT
BE IN THE FOOD THEY EAT?
THEY MIGHT COOK WITH
DUNG FOR ALL WE
KNOW!

CLANG!

OH, HEAVENS, NO...
NOBODY IN THEIR
RIGHT MIND COOKS
WITH DUNG.

GRONK
4

I MEAN IN
THE FOOD, NOT
UNDER IT!





WHERE'D YOU GET THAT?

OUTSIDE ONE OF PRINCESS GRACE'S LADIES SOLD IT TO ME.



I'LL BET SHE DID. DIDN'T EVEN CRACK A GRIN DOING IT, EITHER.

WELL, WHY SHOULD SHE? IT'S SO CLEARLY A WOMAN'S KNIFE.

HOW SO?



UMM... CRESCENT MOON? MONTHLY CYCLE? FEMININE SYMBOL ALL THE WORLD OVER, FOR GENERATIONS UNTOLD?

REALLY, NOW, WHAT ELSE COULD IT REPRESENT?



THE ONLY WOMEN WHO CARRY KNIVES OF THAT DESIGN ARE ELDEST DAUGHTERS WHO HAVE NO BROTHERS.

TURNIN MEN, THEY'RE CALLED.

THAT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING.

NO?

NO. A SYMBOL IS NOT THE THING SYMBOLIZED.



IF I BELIEVE IT'S A WOMAN'S TOOL, THEN IT IS ONE.

DO YOU?

WAIT, BOB

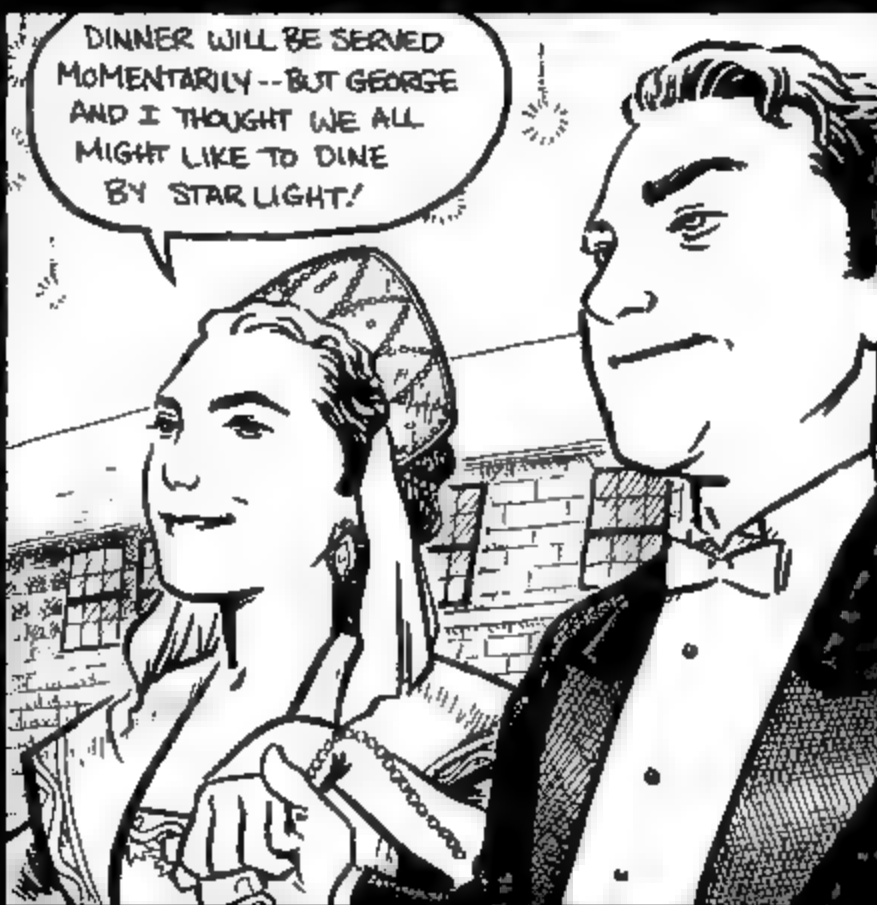


TRADITION DOESN'T MATTER.

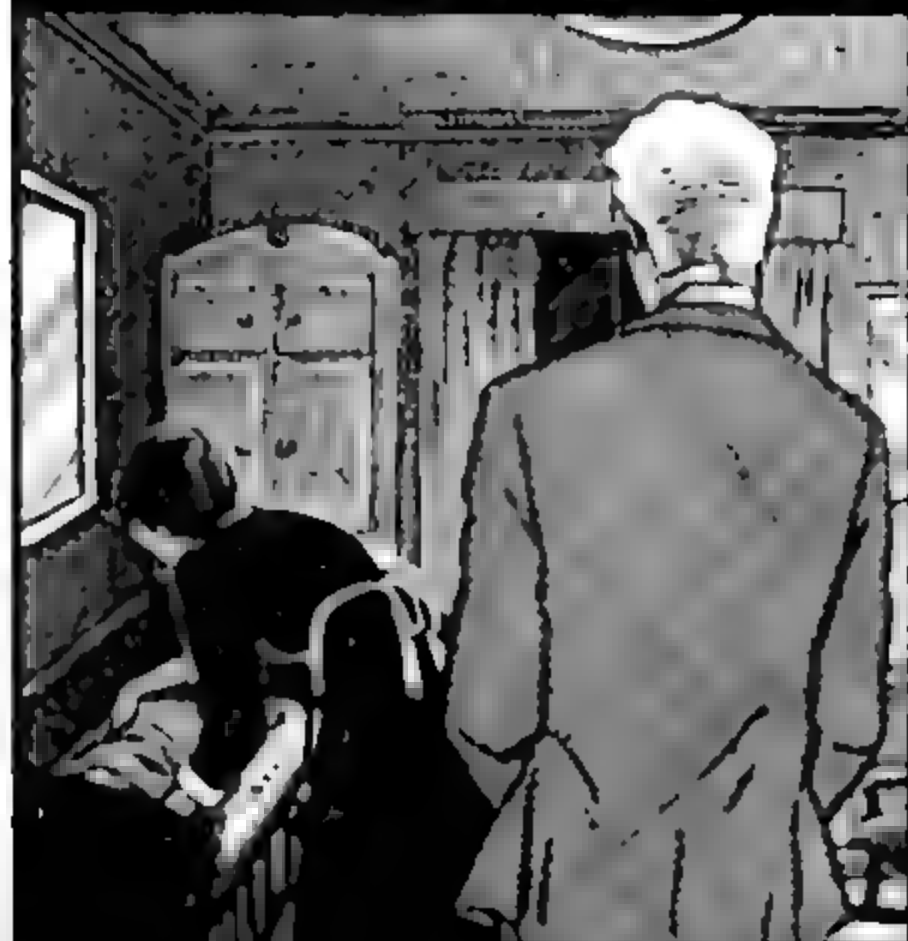
WHEN YOU DON'T WANT IT TO.

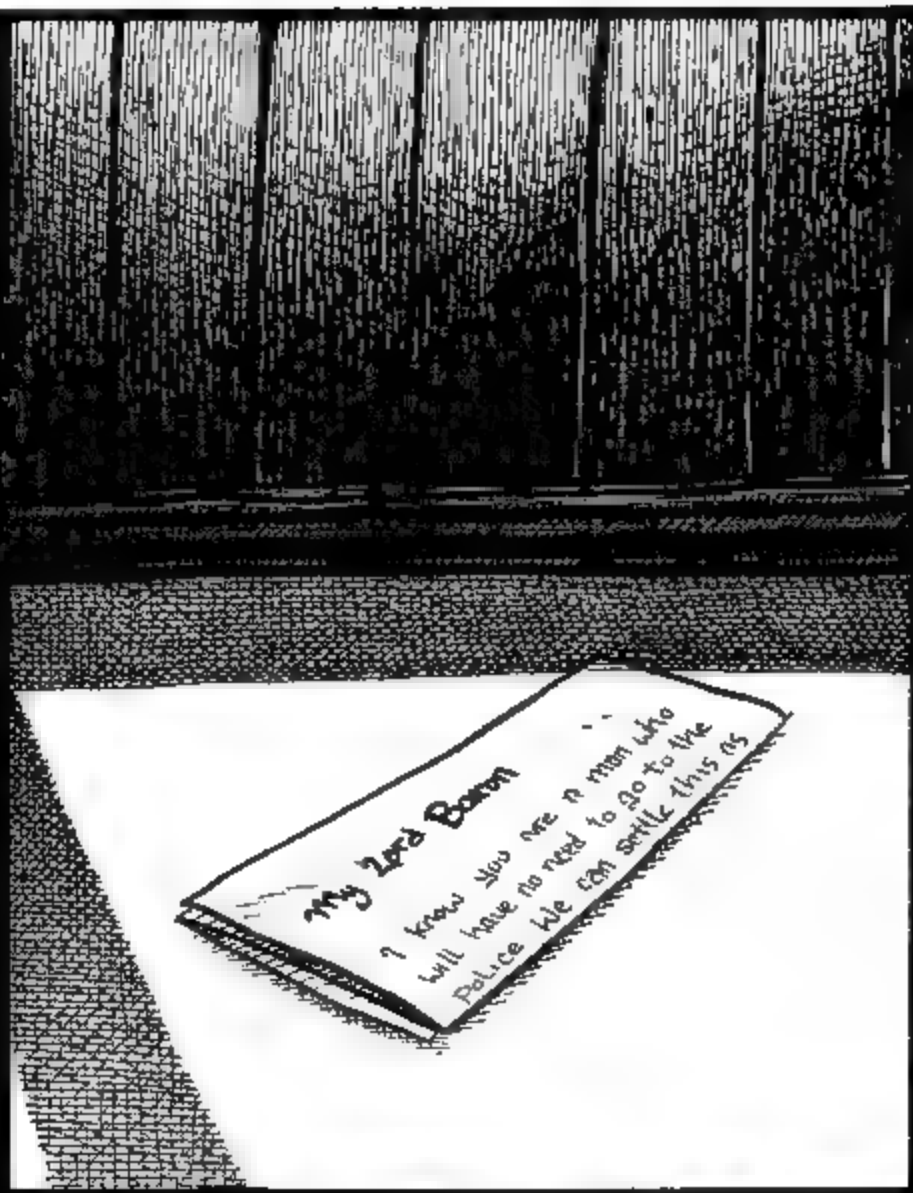
YOU ALWAYS MAKE A POINT OF HARASSING WOMEN WITH KNIVES?

just a song at twilight, when the lights are low













WASH ME
SHI SILENTLY
WASH ME SILENTLY

TOY INDUCES
VOMITING.
ADDITIVE
SUSPECTED

I THINK THAT
THE PRESENCE OF
RABBIT BALANCING IN
THE MEDIA IS THE ONLY
THING THAT MAINTAINS
MY LAST FRAGILE THREAD
OF INNOCENCE.

THEY HAD TIN SACKS
SO THEY HAD SACK RACES
AND THEY FELL ON THEIR
BACKS, AND THEY FELL
ON THEIR FACES,
LADYBUGS TWIRLING --
AT THE LADYBUG
PICNIC --

THERE IS
NO POSSIBILITY
OF RESCUE FROM
THIS REMOTE
LOCATION

ASKED
ME, I TOLD
THEM.

NATIVE UPRISING
LEAVES TWELVE DEAD
AT CES COLORADO PLATFORM
FILM FOR ELEVEN,
STILLS FOR FIVE

WEEHOO!
CORN
BALLER!

TOILET PAPER!
TOILET PAPER! TOILET
PAPER! YAAY!

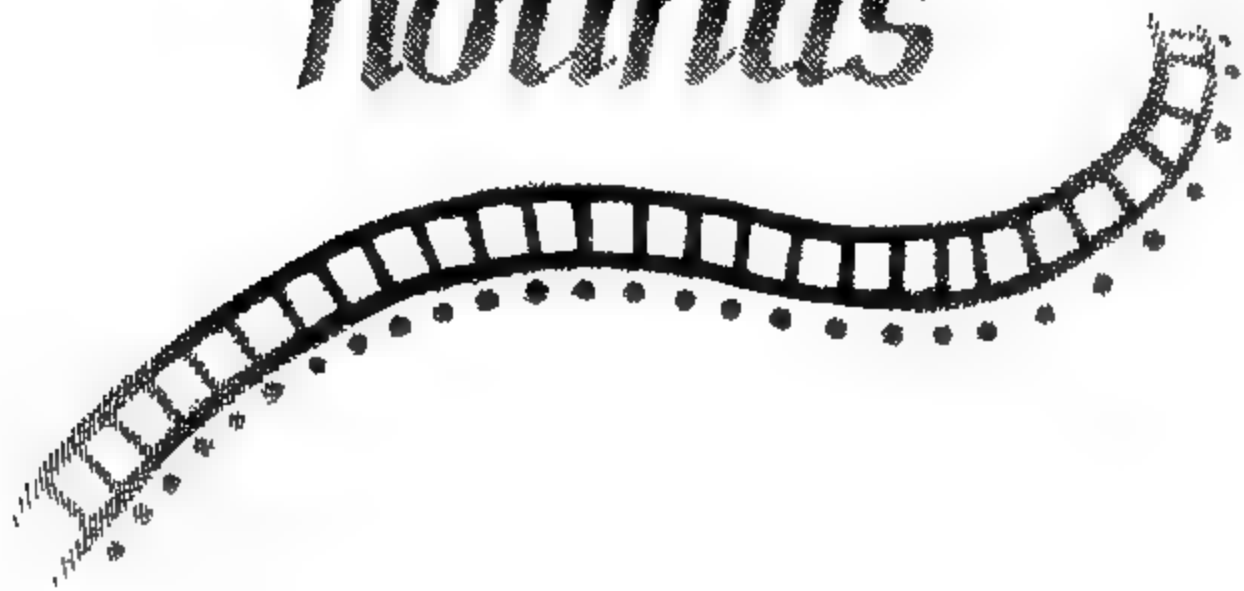
SOCH
THINGS, WHAT CAN
SAID? THERE WAS
ONE, AND NOW
IT'S DEAD.

BT YE DOWN,
FATHER, REST
YE --

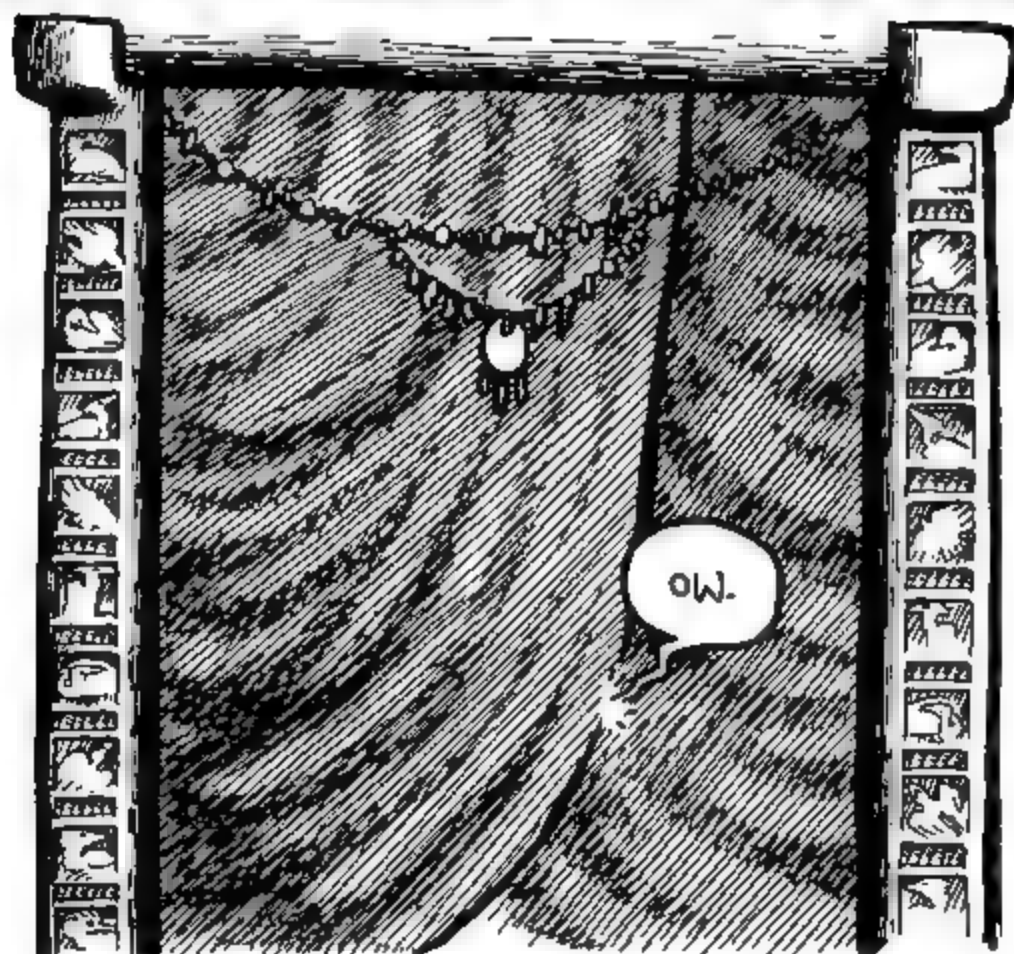
WHEN THORAZINE
WAS DISCOVERED, IT WAS
HAILED AS A MIRACLE --
CALLED "THE CHEMICAL
LOBOTOMY" BECAUSE

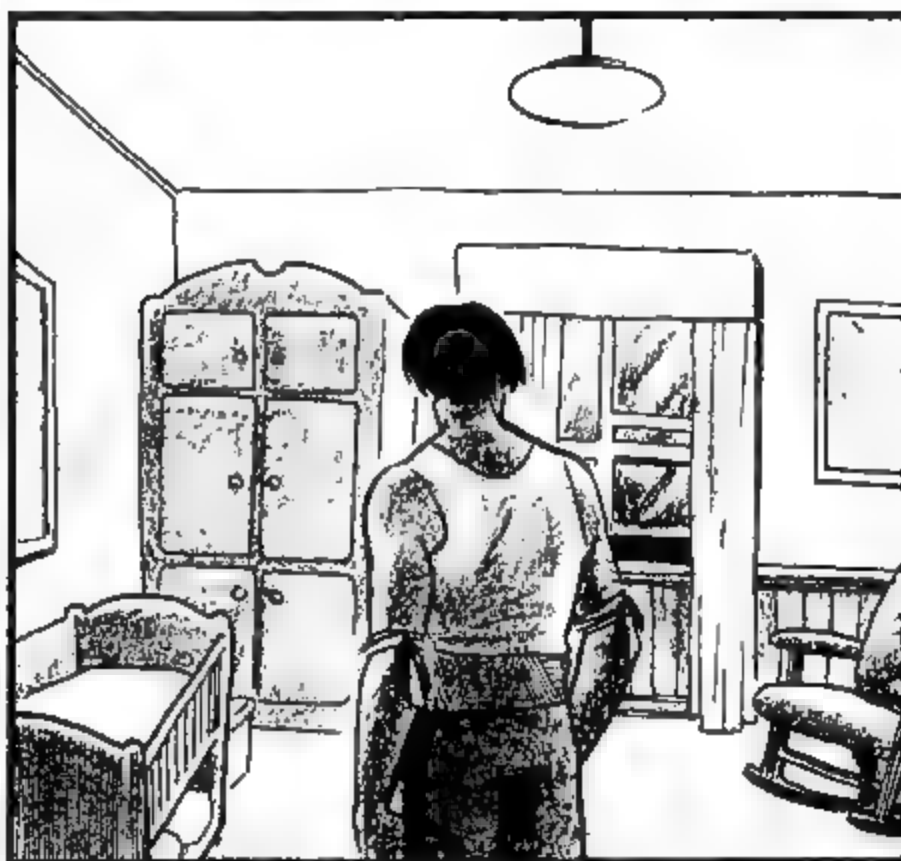
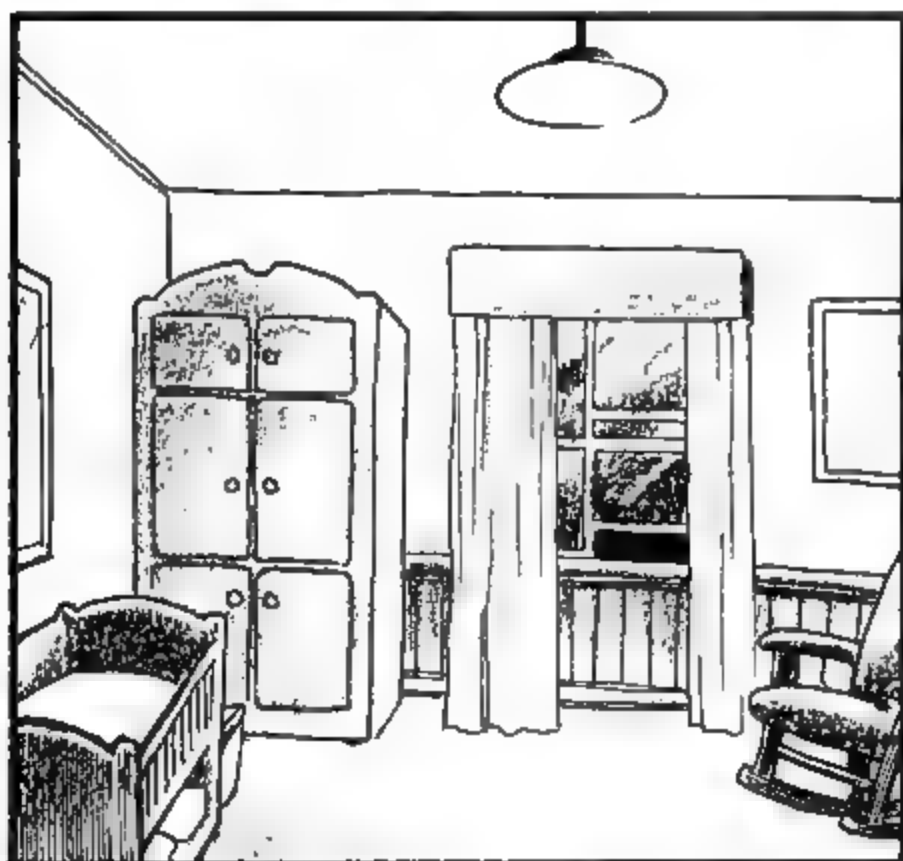
TO BE
ANNOUNCED
...

casting the hounds

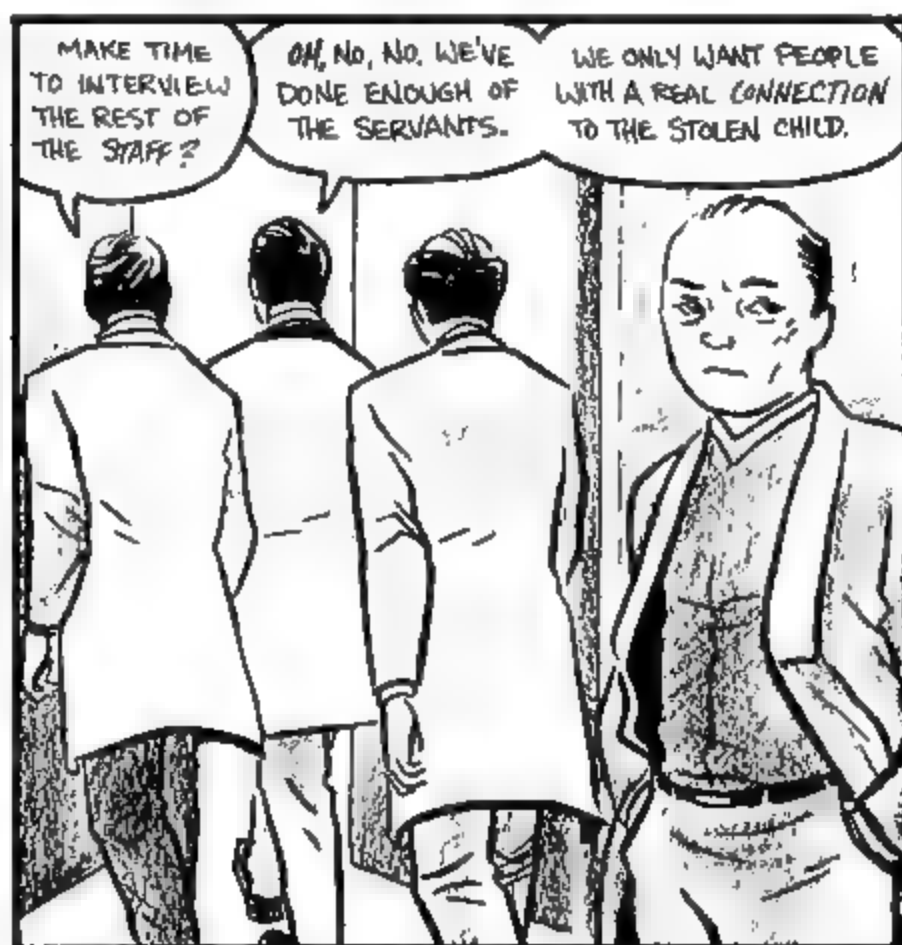




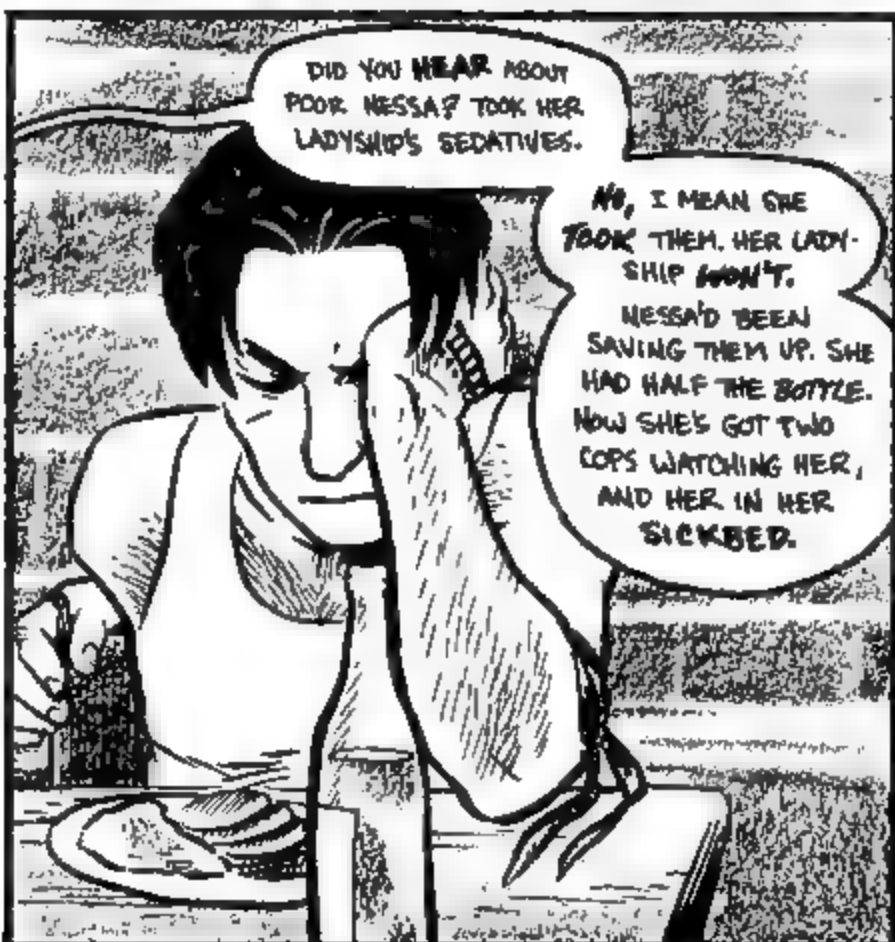


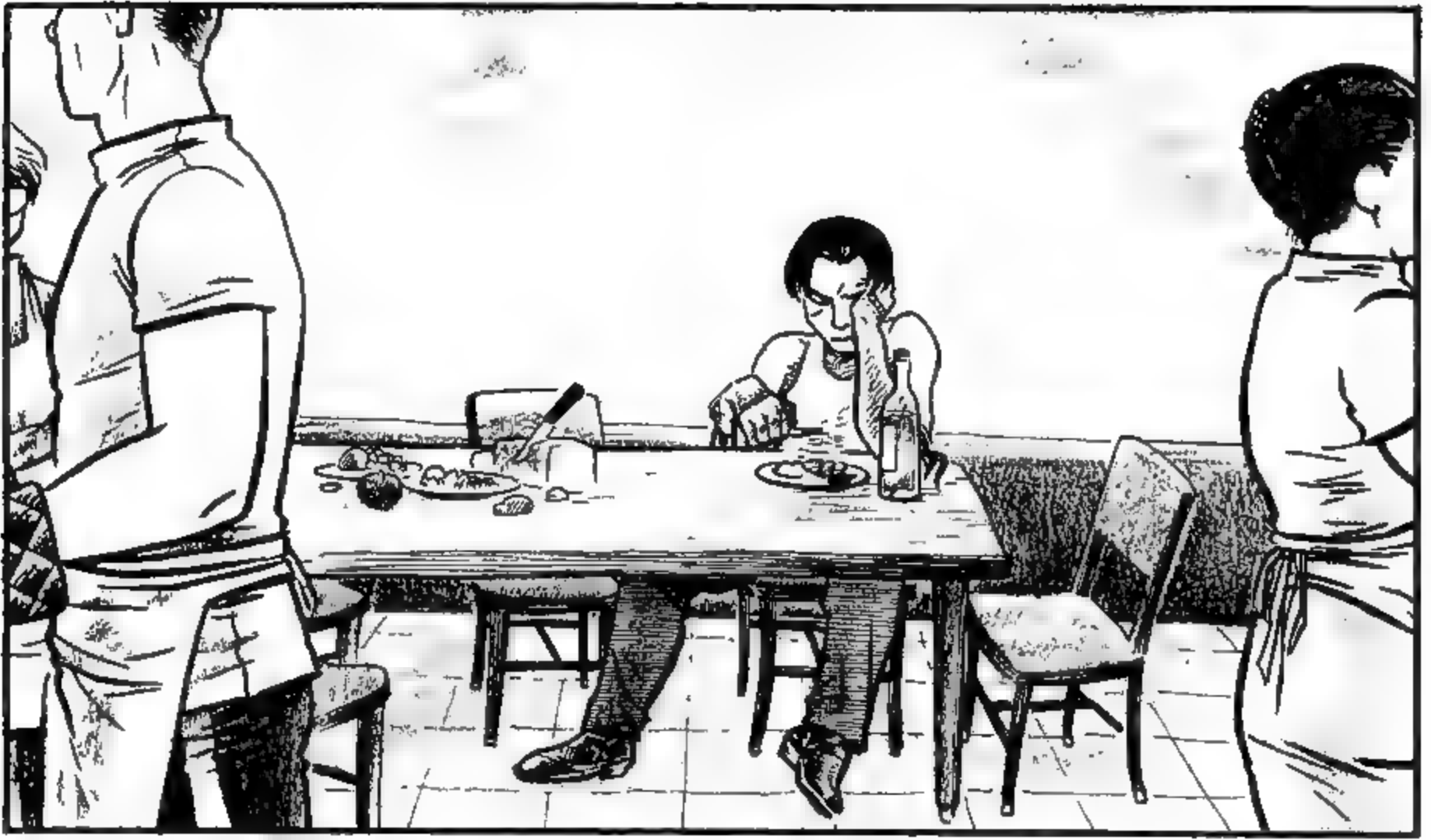






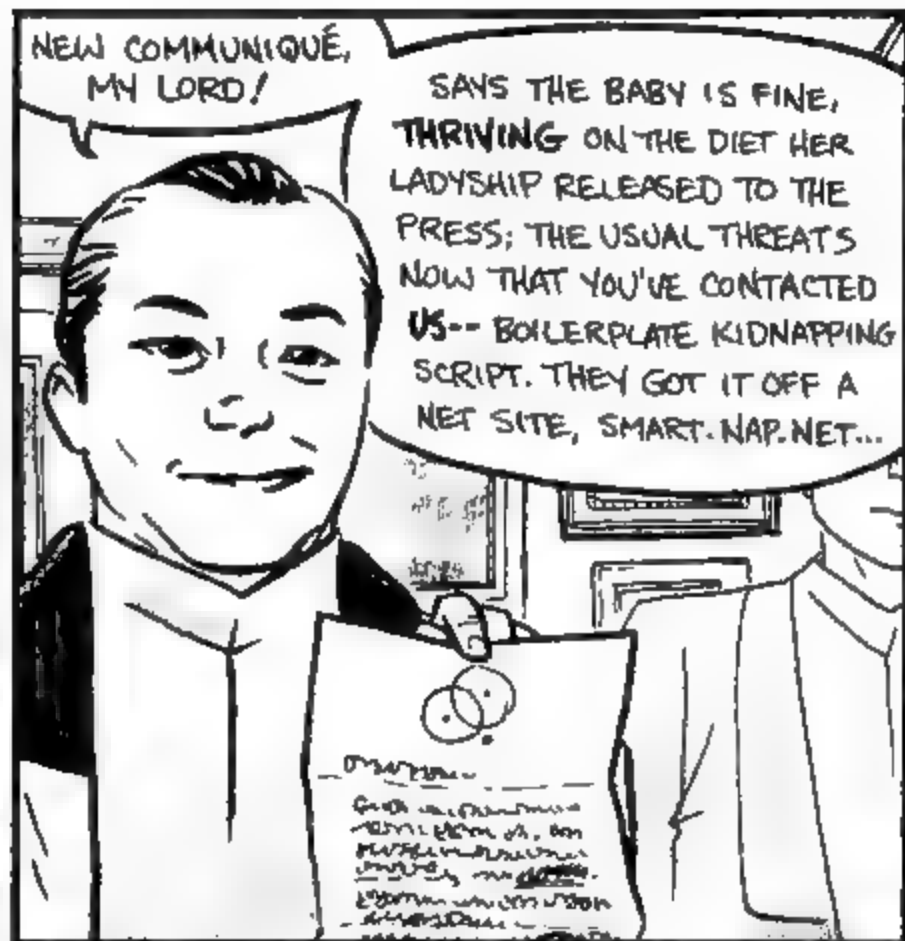
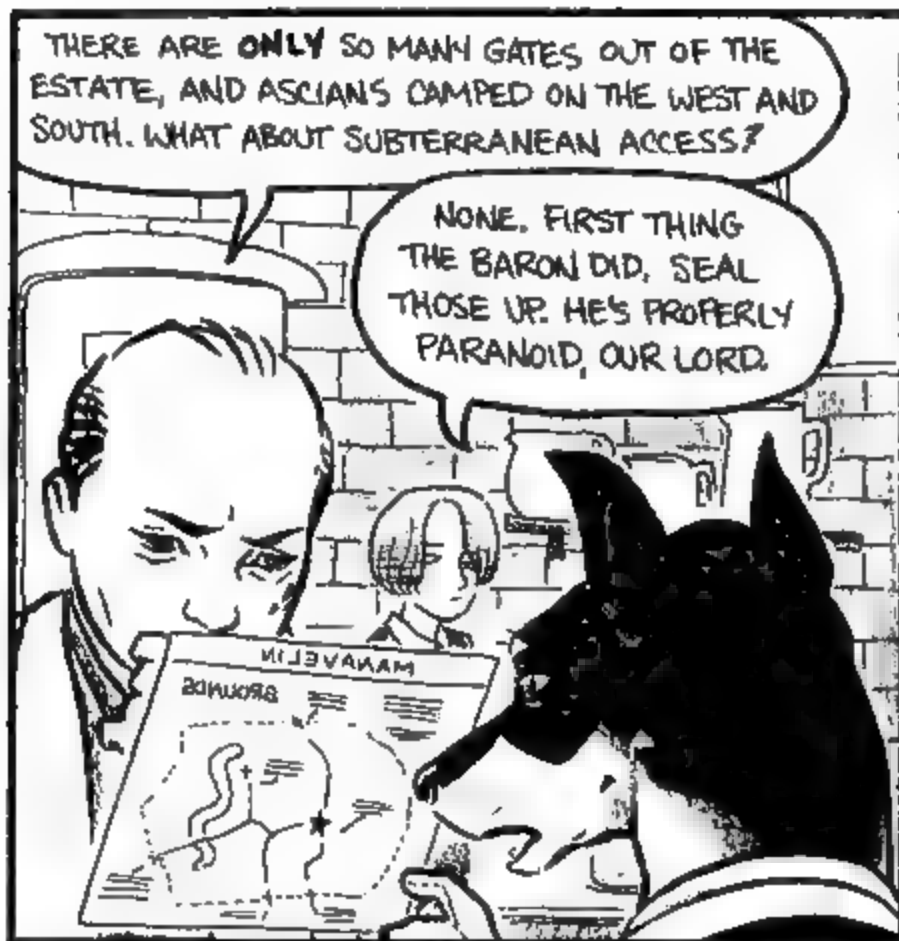


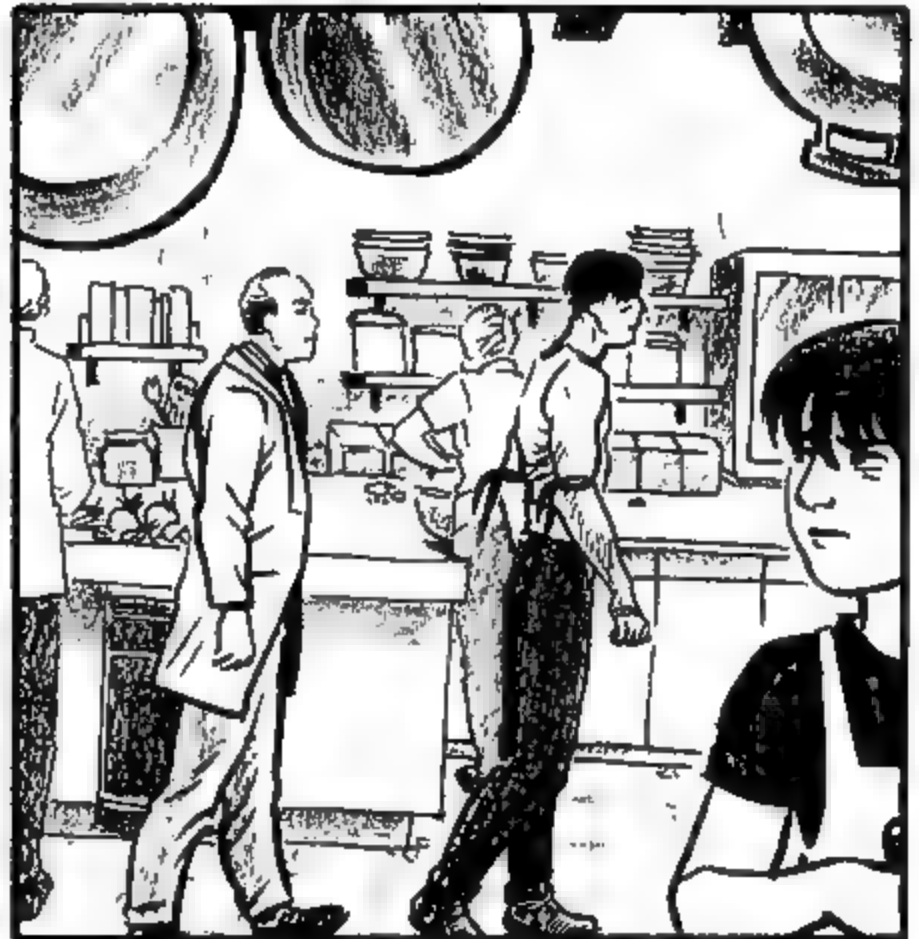
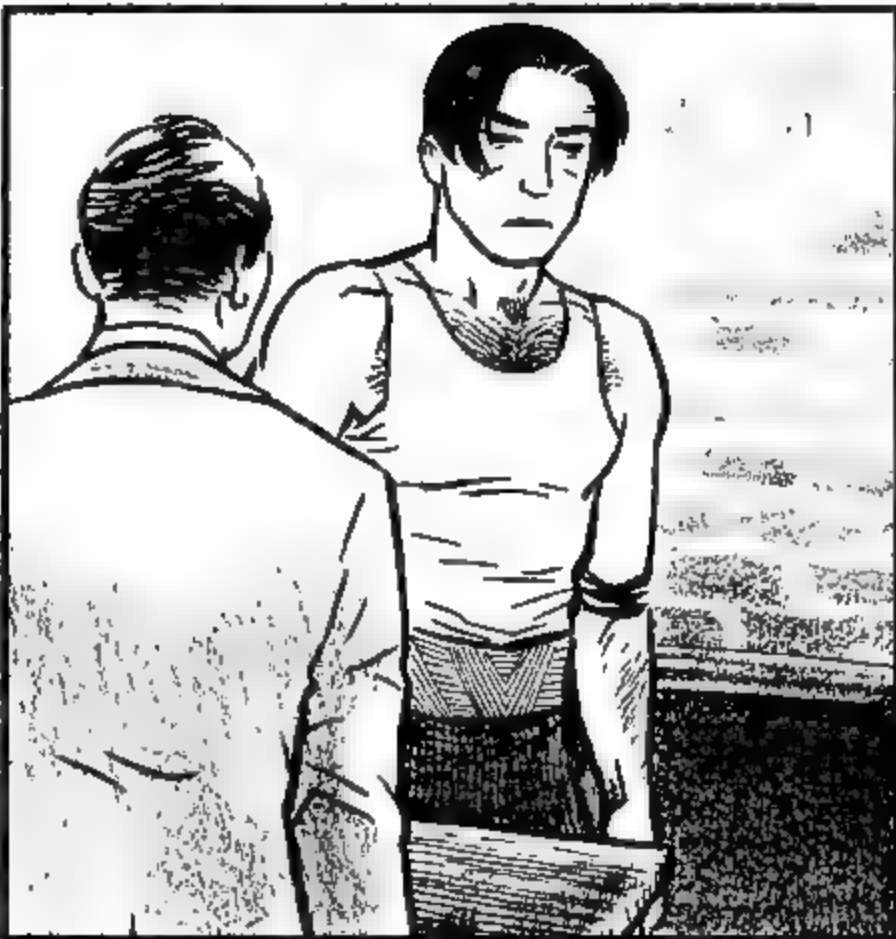
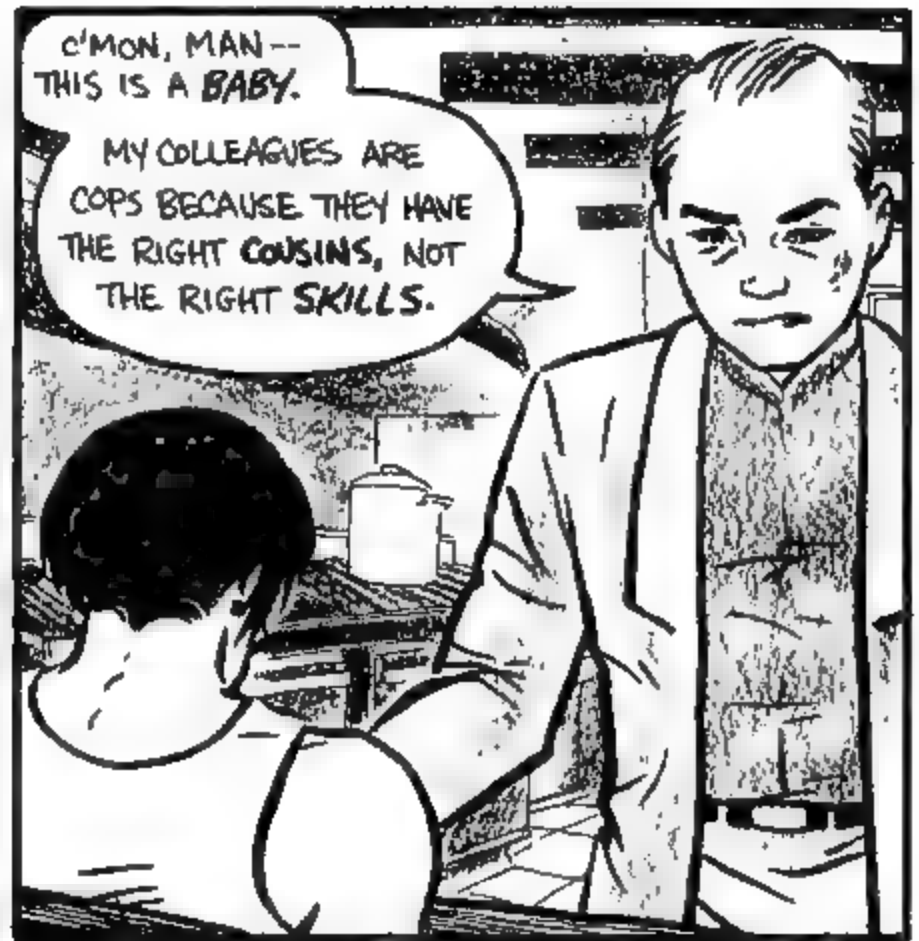




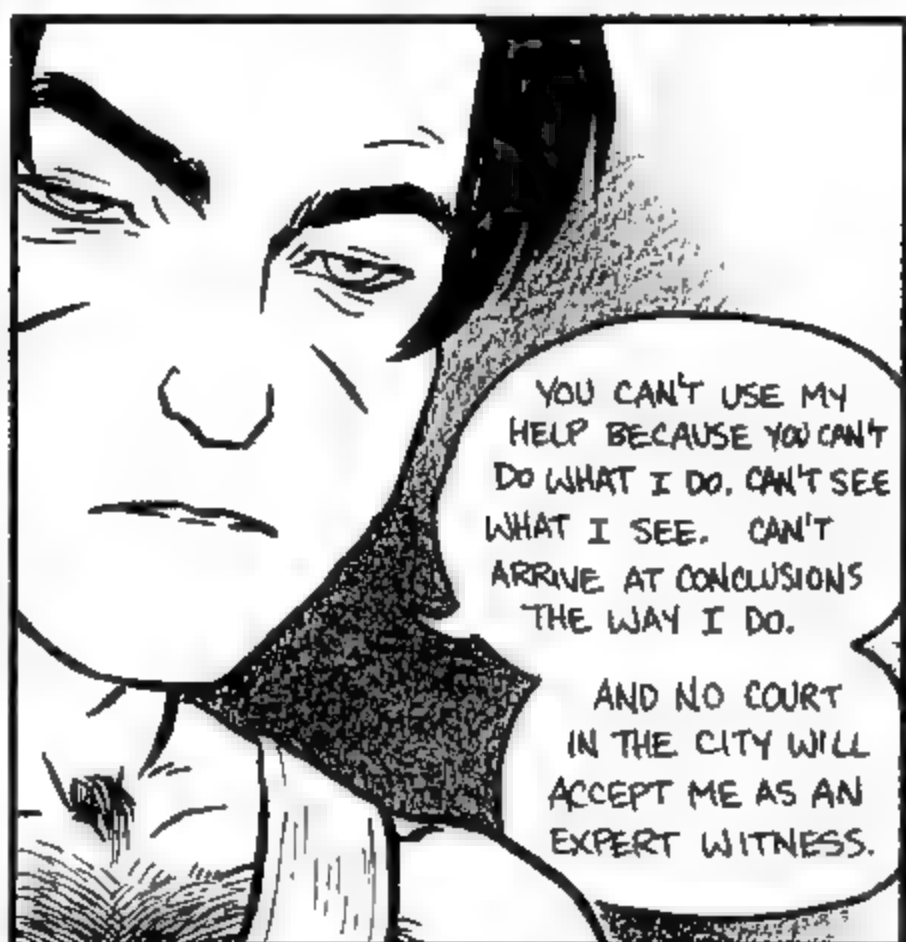
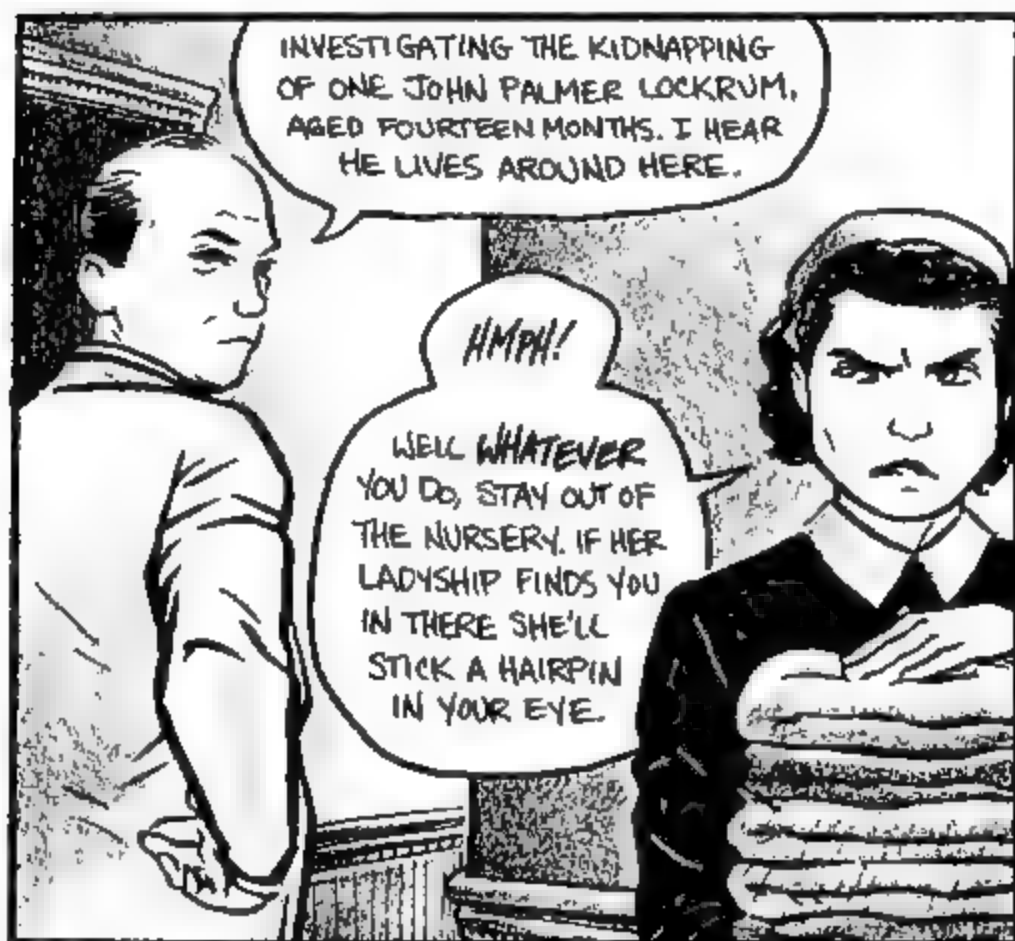






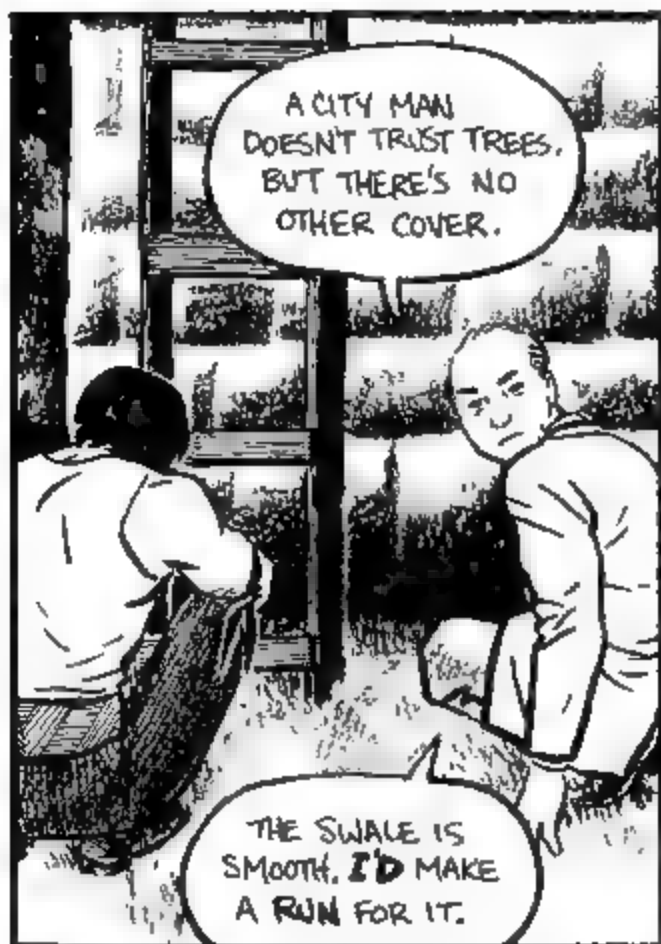


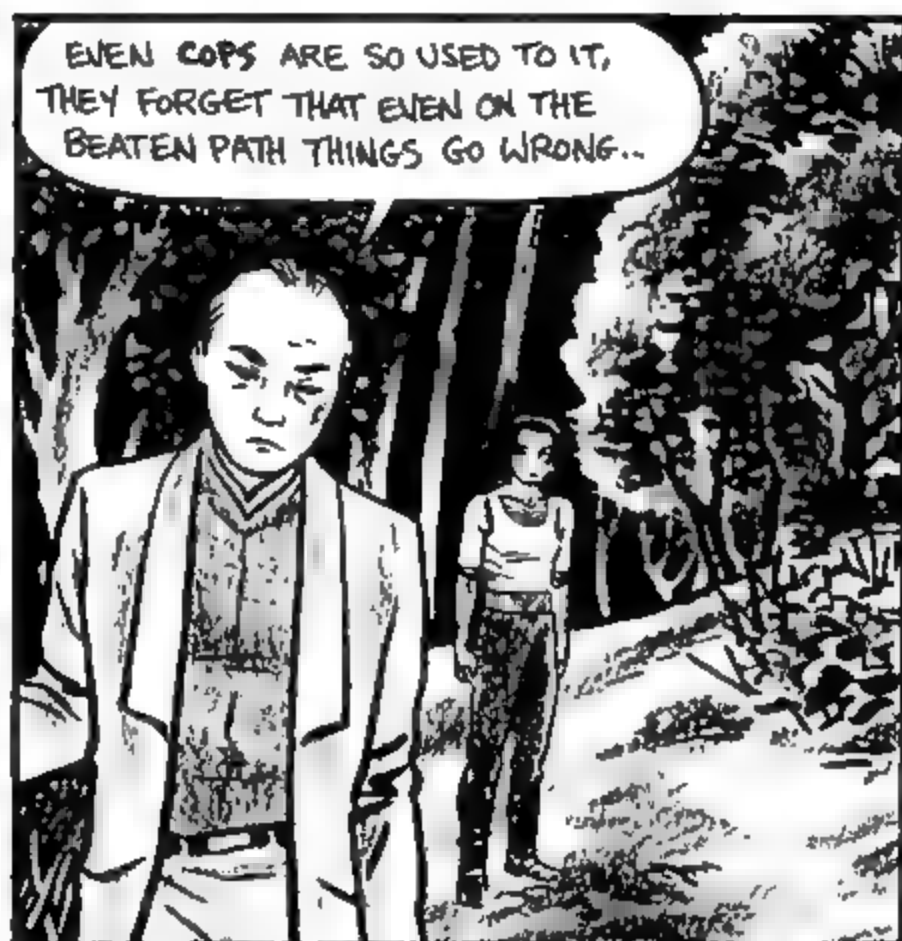
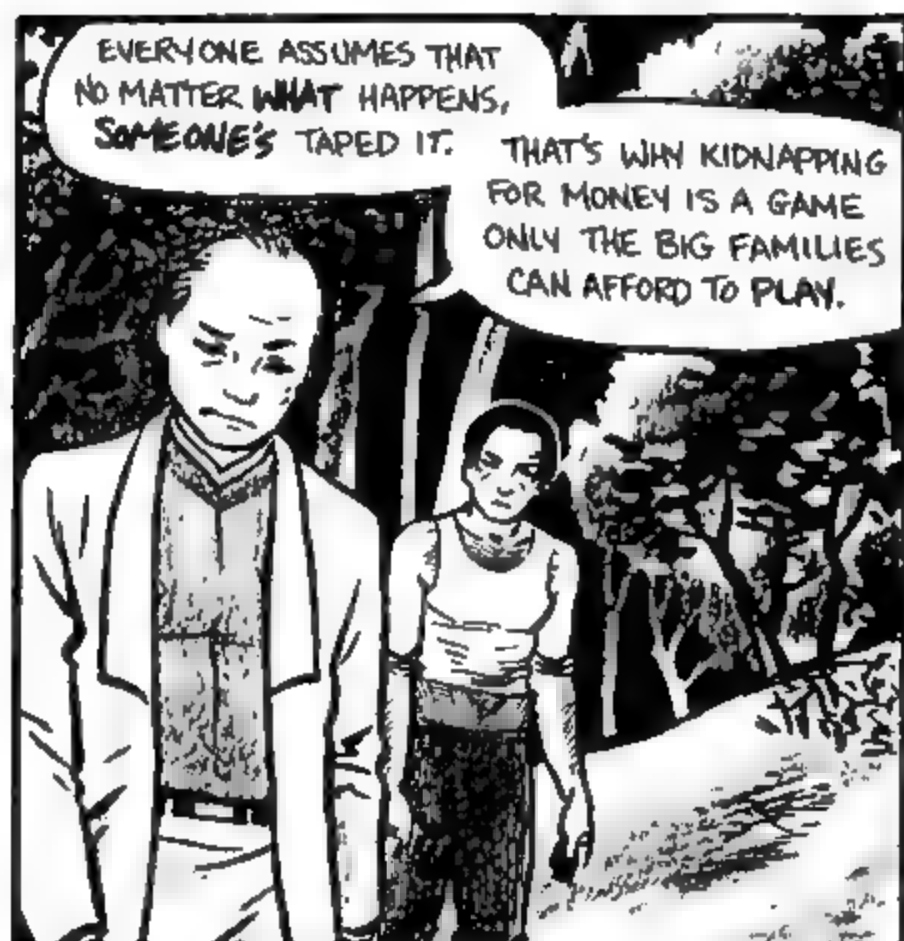


















I AM SPEAKING NOW
TO THE UNKNOWN PERSON
WHO IS HOLDING MY BABY
FOR RANSOM

HE STILL CONSUMES
TWENTY OUNCES OF
PREPARED MILK PER
DAY, IN SUPPLEMENT
TO SOLID FOOD.

HE MUST NOT
BE FED CHICKEN,
TURKEY, QUETZAL,
OR OTHER BIPEDS,
OR RISK
DEVELOPING
ALLERGIES.

PLEASE REFER TO
THE GILDALE CLAN
"FIRST YEAR" HUSBANDRY
MANUAL FOR MORE
DETAILED DIETARY
INSTRUCTIONS. HE
CONFORMS WELL
TO THE TEXT.

HE LIKES
SCHEDULES... HAVE
HIM IN BED BY EARLY
EVENING AND HE'LL
SLEEP ALL NIGHT...
DON'T TRY TO KEEP
HIM AWAKE TO
MAKE HIM TIRED...

PLEASE DON'T
USE TALCUM OR
CORNSTARCH ON
HIM, PLEASE WASH
YOUR CLOTHES AS
WELL AS HIS IN
INFANT LAUNDRY
DETERGENT...

...IF HE CRIES
WITHOUT HIS STUFFED
SQUID, I'M SURE WE
CAN WORK SOME-
THING OUT...

-- PLEASE,
PLEASE --

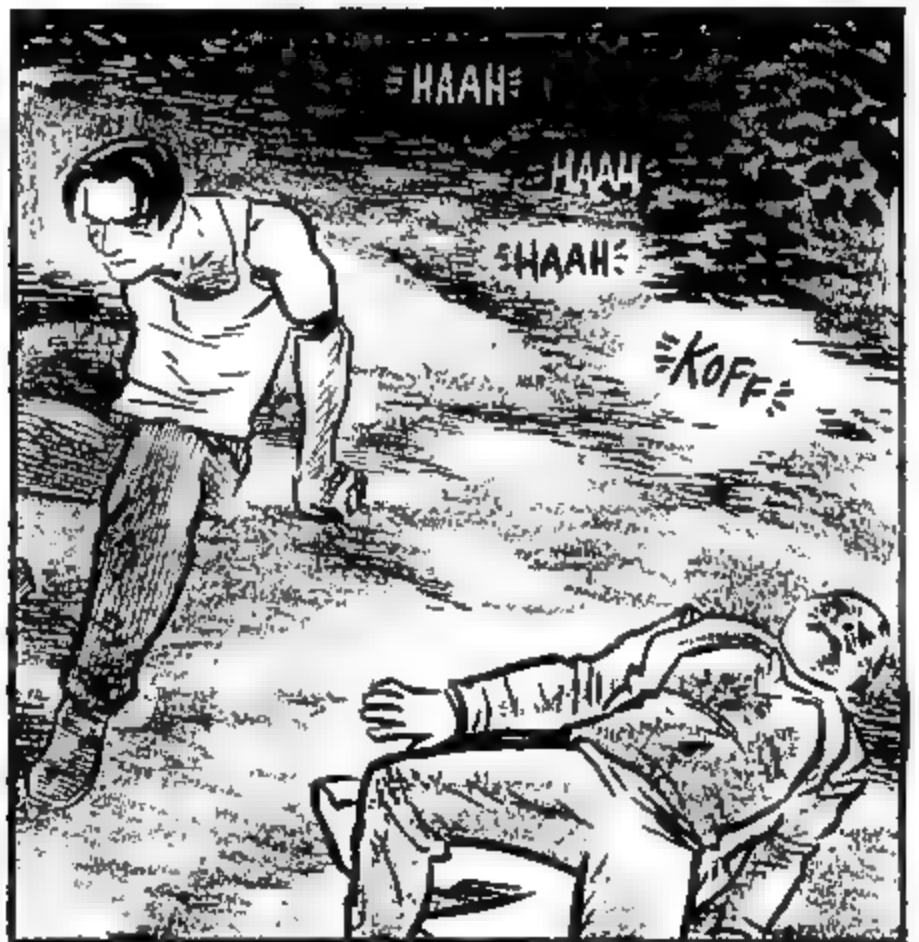




lockrooms











SIR, BE ADVISED THAT YOU ARE SPEAKING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT--

CALL-LOG. 1.12
"YES, YES! WE HAVE WARNED THE BARON NOT TO MAKE THIS A BIG PUBLIC THING! SO MUCH FOR HIM BEING A MAN WHO LOVES HIS PRIVACY! NOW THAT HE HAS, AND THE DANGER HAS INCREASED, WE WANT TWICE THE ORIGINAL RANSOM--"

CALL-LOG. 2.24
"WE WILL INFORM YOU LATER WHERE TO PUT THE MONEY. WE WANT ANOTHER THOUSAND NOW FOR EXTRA EXPENSES. WE HAVE SPARED NO EXPENSE IN TAKING CARE OF THE BABY. HE IS BEING CARED FOR ON A BOAT BY TWO WOMEN. NURSES, BUT WE'RE NOT DOING ~~NOTHING~~ UNTIL THE POLICE ARE OUT OF THE WAY AND THE NEWS GOES ON TO SOMETHING ELSE. WE PLANNED THIS FOR YEARS AND YOU ARE NOT MESSING IT UP."

CALL-LOG. 2.3
"WE HAVE EVERY INTENT TO SEND THE BABY BACK IN GOOD HEALTH. WE WILL FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN BY HER LADYSHIP FULLY. WE CAN'T GIVE HIM BACK UNTIL THINGS QUIET DOWN. SURELY THE BARON CAN AGREE THE RISK."

CALL-LOG. 3.0
"THE BABY IS STRONG AND IN VERY GOOD HEALTH. WE GIVE HIM TWICE AS MUCH FOOD AS HER LADYSHIP SAID. TWO NURSES HAVE GOT HIM DAY AND NIGHT. HE IS QUITE WELL."

CALL-LOG. 8.0
"THE BABY IS WELL THE BABY IS BETTER THAN IT WAS. TELL THE BARONESS NOT TO WORRY. WE CAN'T COME FOR THE MONEY YET. IT'S TOO MUCH RISK. I COULD GET THIRTY YEARS, JUST FOR DOING NOTHING AT ALL. I COULD EVEN BURN."

CALL-LOG 5.2
"THERE IS TOO MUCH RISK. IT WOULD MEAN THIRTY YEARS. I MUST PROTECT MY PARTNERS. THEY ARE THE ONES WHO DID IT. I AM ONLY A GO-BETWEEN. EVEN SO I COULD GET THIRTY YEARS. I MIGHT EVEN BURN."

CALL-LOG. 9.13
"WHAT IF THE BABY IS DEAD? WILL I BURN IF THE BABY IS DEAD?"

I THINK THE BARON DOESN'T NEED TO SEE THAT ONE.

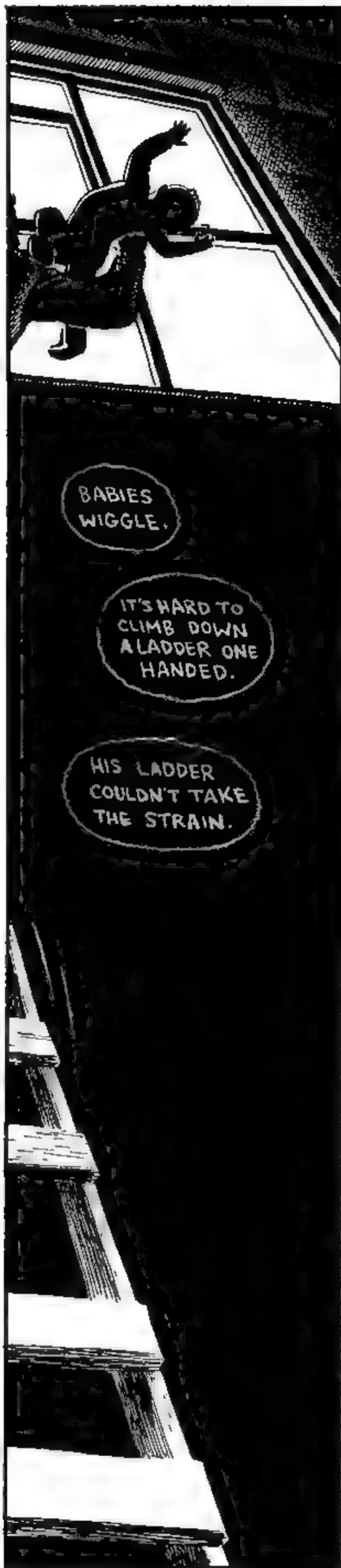
RIGHT.

"SO.

"GUY COMES
ONTO THE GROUNDS
IN THE DARK. HE
BRINGS A HOMEMADE
FOLDING LADDER.

"NOT ONE RUNG
MORE THAN HE NEEDS.
EXACTLY THE HEIGHT
OF THE NURSERY
WINDOW, NOT ONE
OUNCE HEAVIER
THAN IT HAS TO BE.

"CEPT HE
FORGETS."







NO, WE JUST
COULDN'T USE THE
PHONE CALL.

WE COULD ACT
ON FACTUAL INFORMATION
IN THE CALL, TRY TO GET
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE TO
CONNECT THE CRIMES
TO YOU.

IF WE FIND
ANY, THE ACADEMY
ISN'T TURNING OUT
A LOT OF GO-
GETTERS.



**HIRE
ME.**



YOU KNOW
I CAN'T

**FIND
A WAY.**

...YOU...

**I'M
WHAT'S
MISSING!**



ME AND
MY KIND.

THERE'S NOT A
TEN-YEAR-OLD KID
AMONG ASCIANS THAT
COULDN'T HAVE
TRAILED THIS GUY!

YOU PEOPLE
ARE BLIND AND
DEAF COMPARED
TO US--

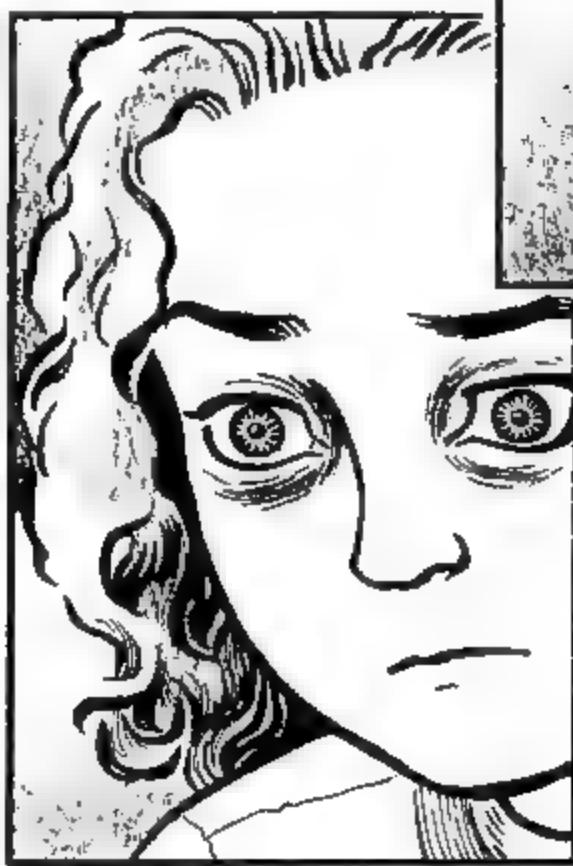
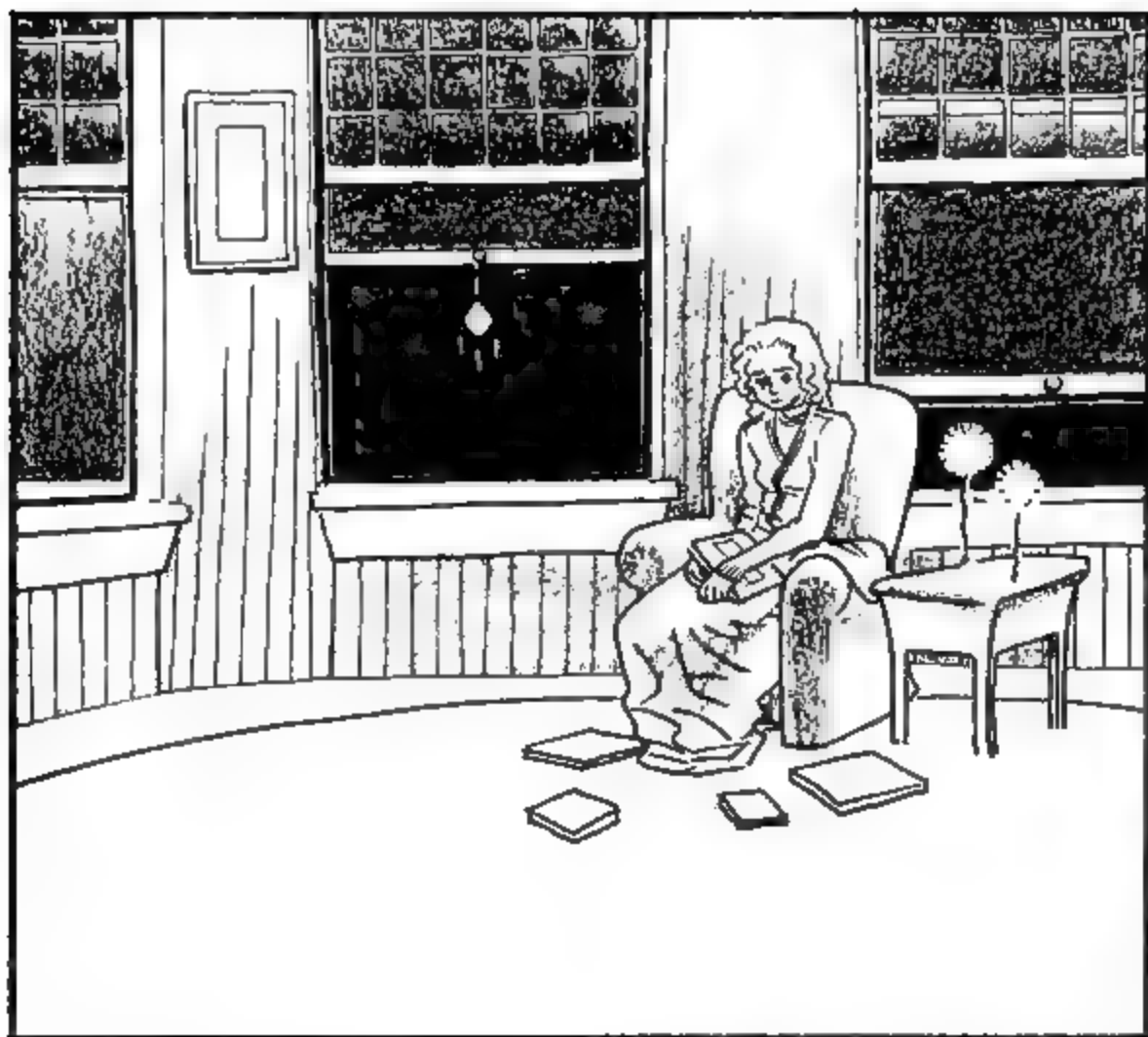


YOU *KNOW* WE
CAN'T. YOU KNOW
WHY WE CAN'T.
YOU ARE CITIZENS
OF *NOWHERE*, YOU'RE
ALL AN ELECTION
AWAY FROM
DEPORTATION.

WE HAVE
TO FIND A WAY
TO CATCH THIS GUY
WITHOUT
YOU.



WITHOUT **ME**
YOU'D HAVE TO
LET THAT POOR
WOMAN GO ON
THINKING HER
BABY'S
ALIVE.









TWINS!

OH,
THEY WILL KILL
ME-- THEY'LL KILL
MY-- MY
CHILDREN--

NO ONE WILL COME IN,
NOR EVEN LOOK AT YOU-- NO
ONE WILL BREAK THE BIRTH
VEIL. NOT EVEN YOUR MAN
WOULD DARE. THEY WILL
TURN A BLIND EYE
FOR TEN DAYS--



FOR TEN
DAYS!

**TEN
DAYS!**

WHAT DO WE
DO FOR TEN DAYS
TO FIX THIS?



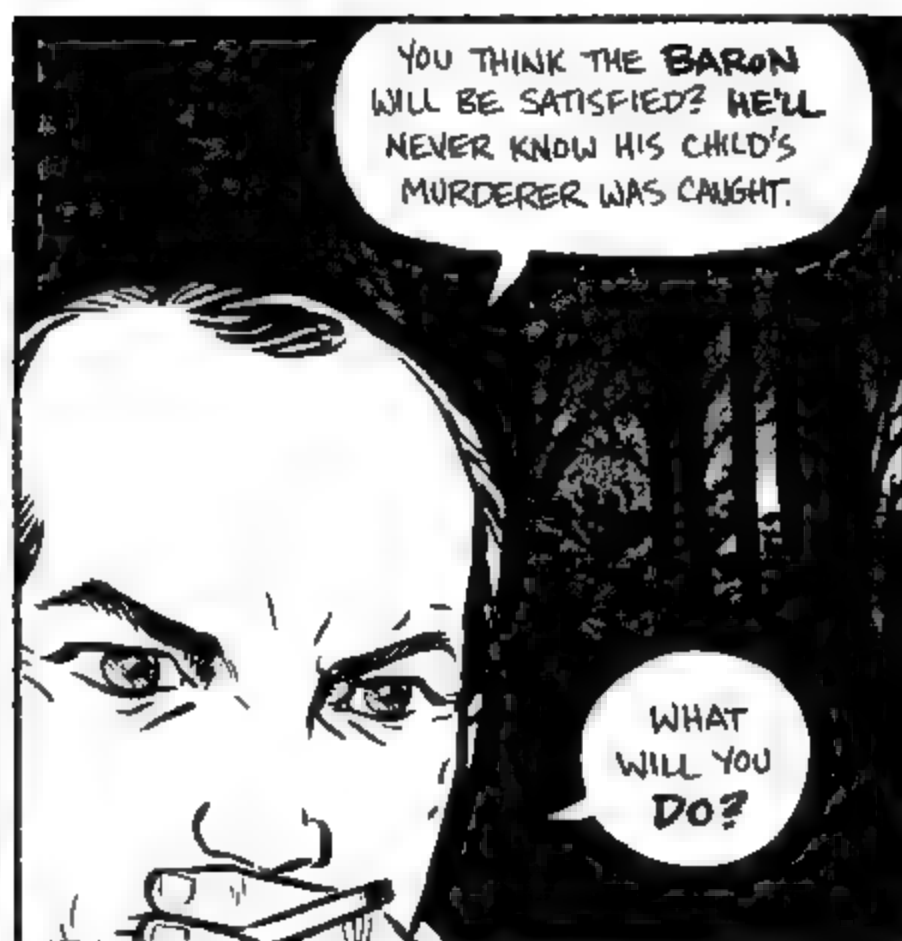
PRAY



PRAY.



THE
ANSWER
WILL
COME.





WELL...

IN HERE
YOU'D JUST
BE ANOTHER
FILTHY,
VIOLENT,
DRUNKEN
ASCIAN.



AND
YOU'D GO
TO
JAIL.



AND THEN BOTH
YOUR PROBLEMS
WOULD GO AWAY,
WOULDN'T THEY?

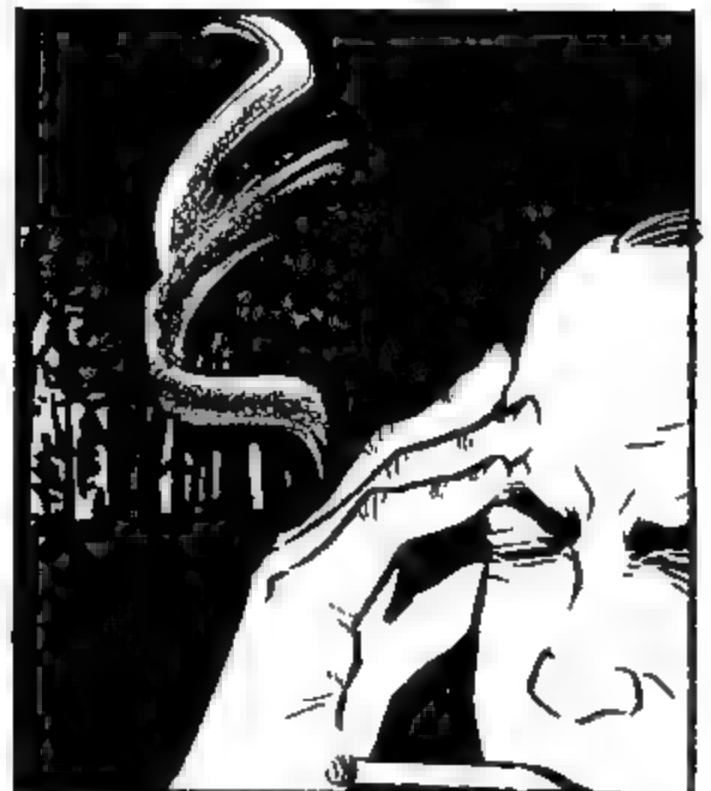
OH,
FOR --



?

HEY!

DON'T-





PLEASE,
MAN.

IF YOU DIDN'T **DO** IT,
COULD YOU **STOP** GIVING
THE COURTS EVIDENCE THAT
POINTS TO YOU?

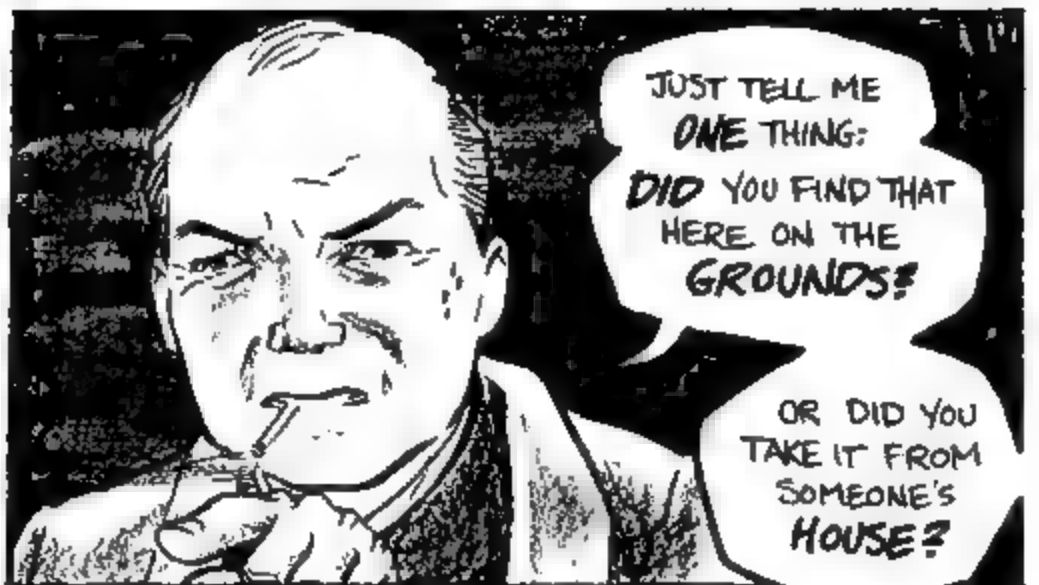


WHA--

AH,
NO--

NO.

DOES THAT-- IS
THAT THE KIDNAPPER'S?



JUST TELL ME
ONE THING:
DID YOU FIND THAT
HERE ON THE
GROUNDS?

OR DID YOU
TAKE IT FROM
SOMEONE'S
HOUSE?





FIND
A
WAY.

I'LL
GIVE IT
ALL TO
YOU.

YOU
FIND A
WAY TO
USE IT.

I'M NOT
GOING TO
WALK AWAY
FROM WHAT
I KNOW.

I'M NOT
GOING TO
JAIL IN
SOMEONE
ELSE'S
PLACE.

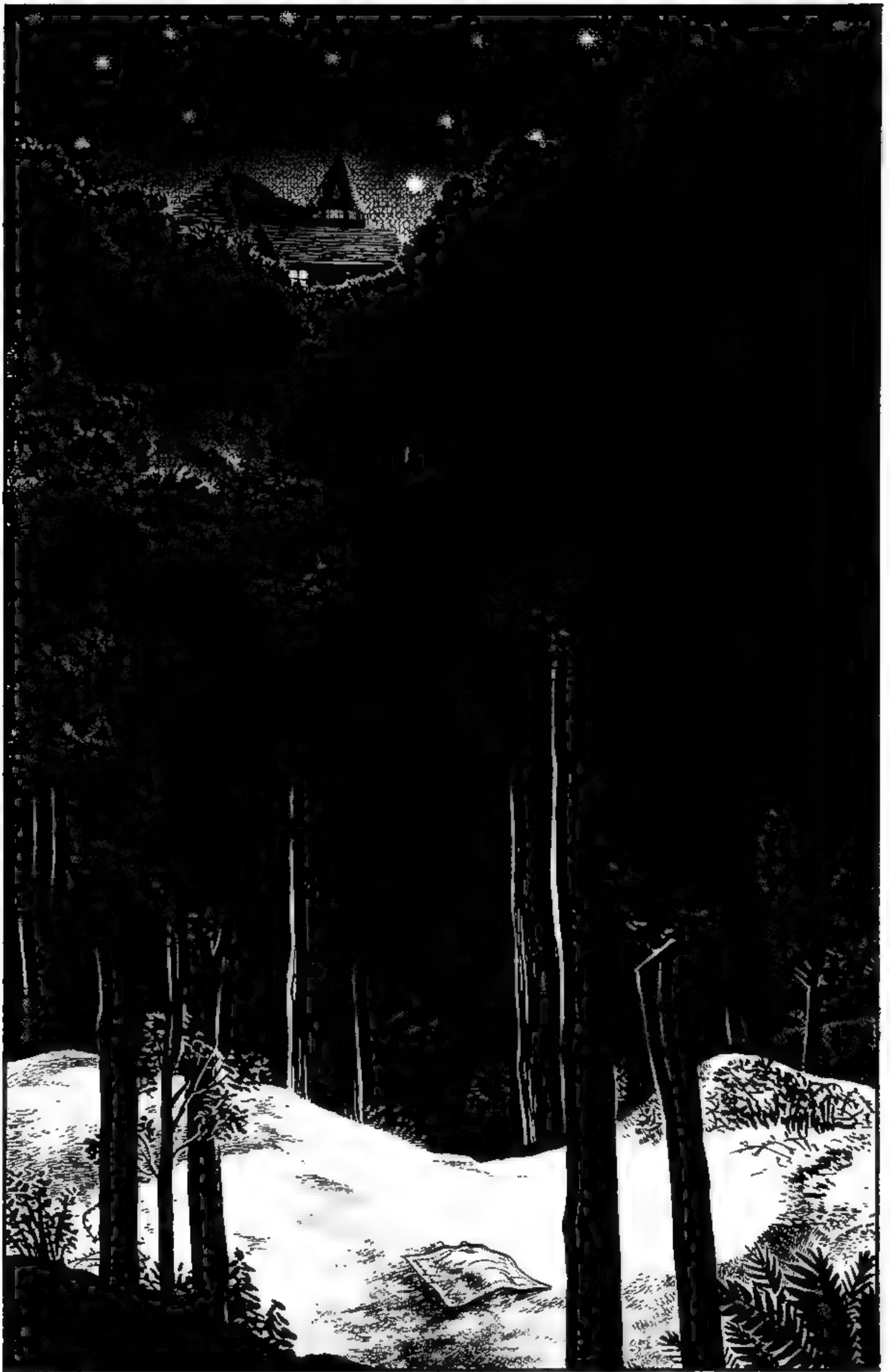
I'LL GIVE
YOU TEN
DAYS.

TEN DAYS
IS ENOUGH FOR
ALL KINDS OF
THINGS.

EXCUSE
ME?

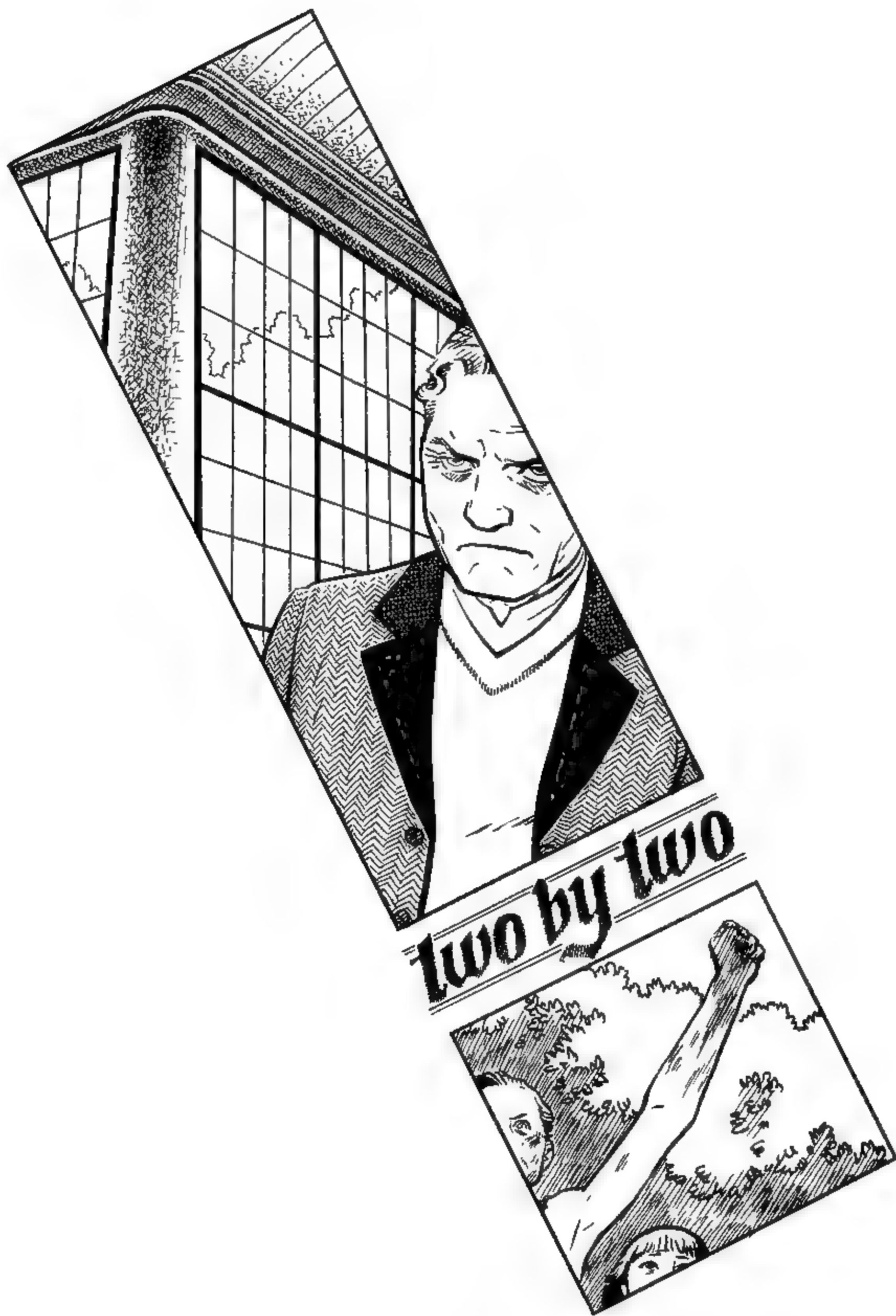
YOU
HEARD.











WHEN YOU ARE
YOUNG, YOU DON'T
PAY MUCH ATTENTION
TO WARS, EVEN IF
YOU'RE IN ONE.

MAYBE ESPECIALLY
IF YOU'RE IN ONE.
THERE'S NO TIME.

I WAS ON A BUS TRAVELING
FROM BELTYNE TO ANVARD.
OUR BUS BLEW SOME TIRES
AND WAS BOARDED.

WE WERE REROUTED
TO A FIELD HOSPITAL.

MIRACLE CURES COME OUT OF
THESE HOSPITALS, OUT IN THE
MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.

DRUGS.

VACCINES.

SURGICAL
TECHNIQUES.

I WASN'T THERE LONG
ENOUGH TO PANIC. I ESCAPED
BEFORE THERE WAS TIME TO
STARVE OR GET SICK OR WORRY
ABOUT WHO I WAS LEAVING BEHIND.

I WAS THERE
A DAY AND A NIGHT
AND A DAY,
AND I BROUGHT
OUT EVERYONE
I COULD.



WE WERE
IN THE CONTROL
GROUP. WE WEREN'T
WATCHED AS CLOSELY.

JAM.



DAVIS RIBERRA, 6

IF WE HADN'T BEEN
SEPARATED FROM THE
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP,
WE'D NEVER HAVE
GOTTEN AWAY.



MIW HAAS, 13



JOHN BELL

WE WENT OUT THROUGH
THE SHIT TRENCHES. THE
GUARDS DIDN'T BELIEVE WE
HAD THE NERVE TO GO IN THERE.



WILLIAM GROVER, 9

DEBORAH

WE FOLLOWED THE
RIVER OUT. WE KNEW
WE COULDN'T DRINK IT.



WE MOVED FAST FOR
THE FIRST TWO DAYS, THAT'S
ALL... WE GOT FURTHER THAN
THEY THOUGHT WE COULD.
THAT WAS GEORGE.
HE GOT US OUT.



WALTER PAYNE, 7



TWO BY TWO.
NOBODY GOT LOST.

TWO BY TWO.
LIKE SCHOOL.

CHILD HERO SAVES 28

WE MADE
IT OUT.

ALL OF US,
EVEN THE LITTLEST.

WE MADE
IT OUT.

IT WASN'T UNTIL
WE WERE "SAFE" THAT
ANYBODY DIED ON ME.

GEORGE, IT
WASN'T JUST THE
CESSPITS. IT WAS
THE WATER. YOU
COULDN'T HAVE
KNOWN.

...BUNCH
OF KIDST

NO RIGHTS A
TO CULL P

RESERVOIR POPULATIONS

THE KIDS,
THE LITTLE
ONES...

HOURS.

FRANK..

KAY.

I LOST
SOME.

GEORGE,
YOU'RE NOT
TO BLAME.

**I LOST
SOME**

GEORGE,
YOU SAVED
SO MANY...

MY PARENTS, MY AUNTS...
MY BROTHER...

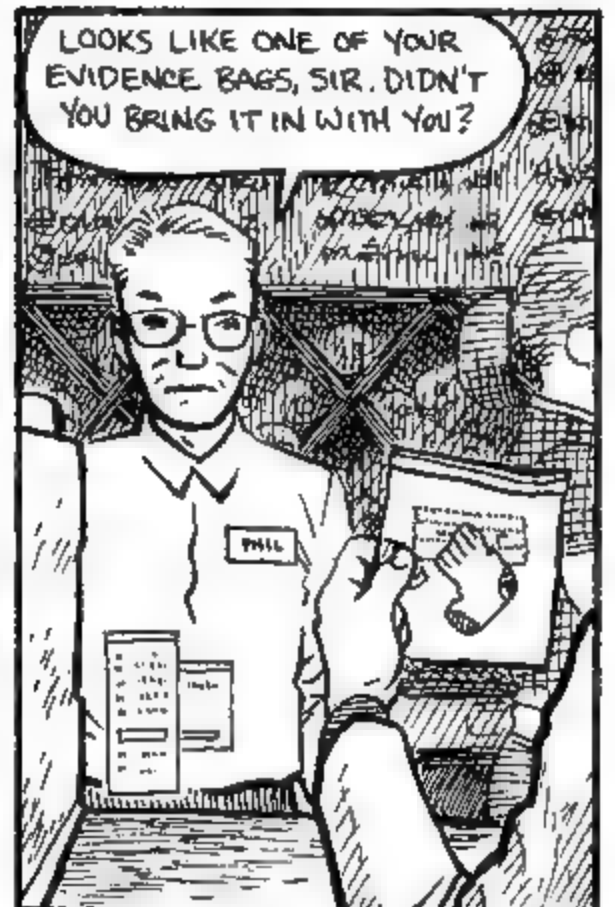
**I LOST
SOME.**

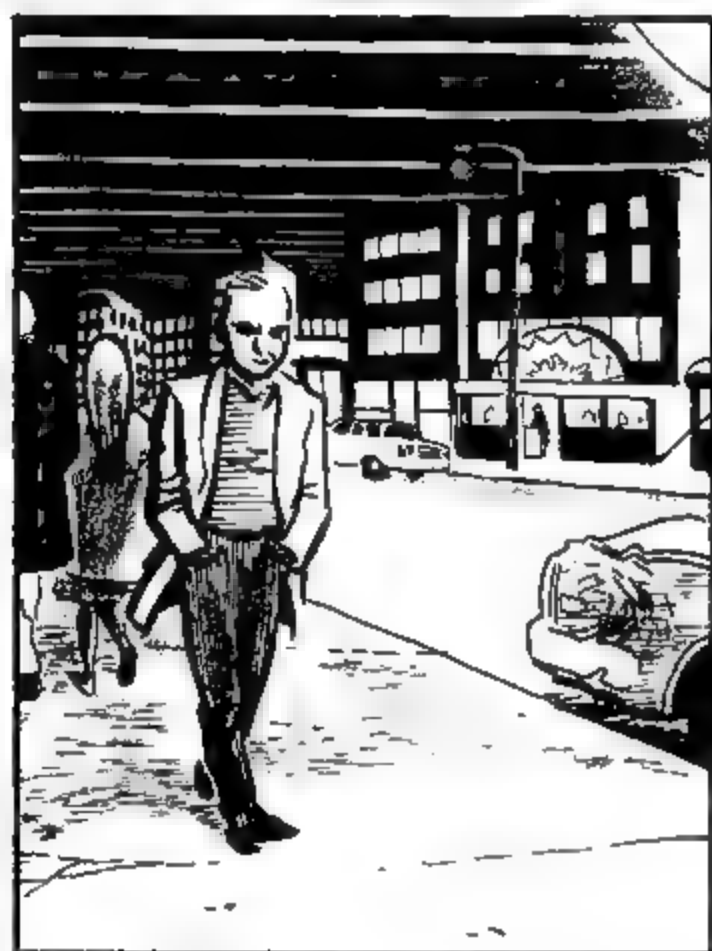
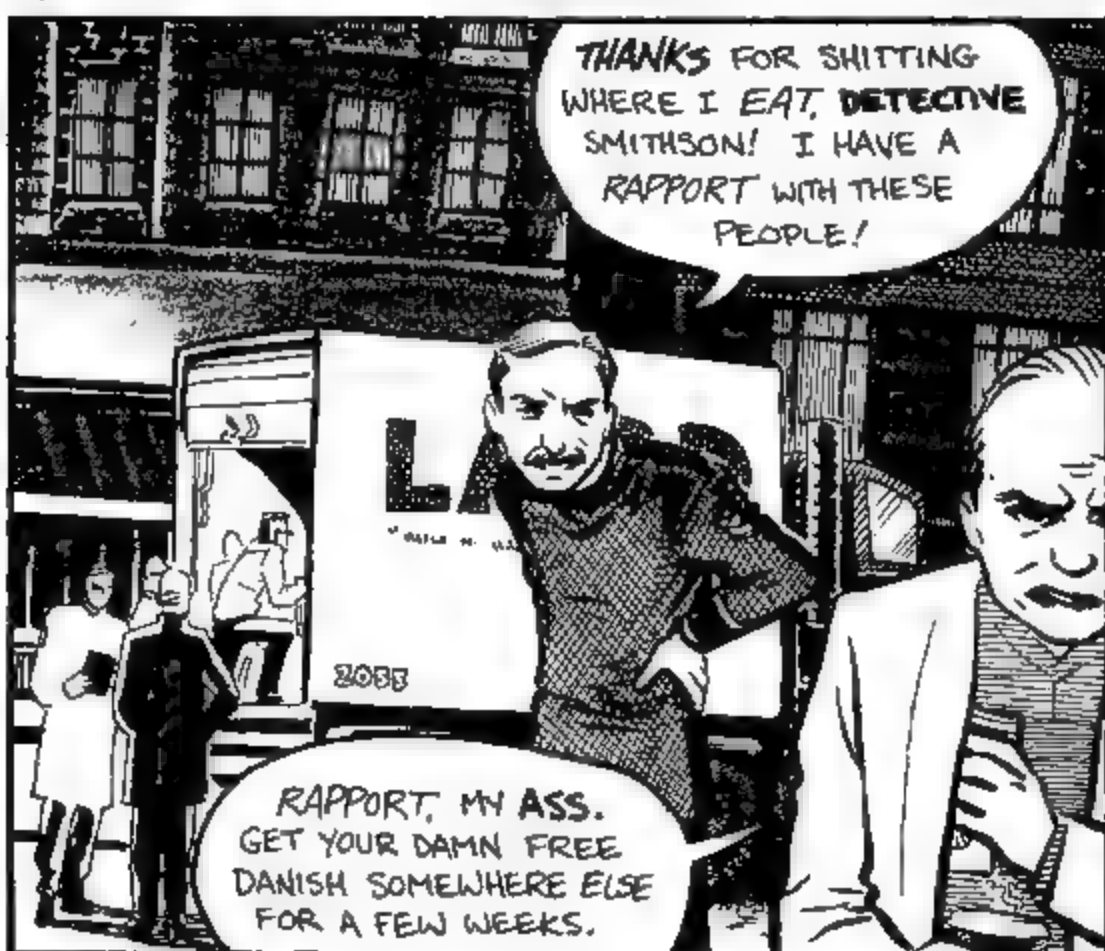
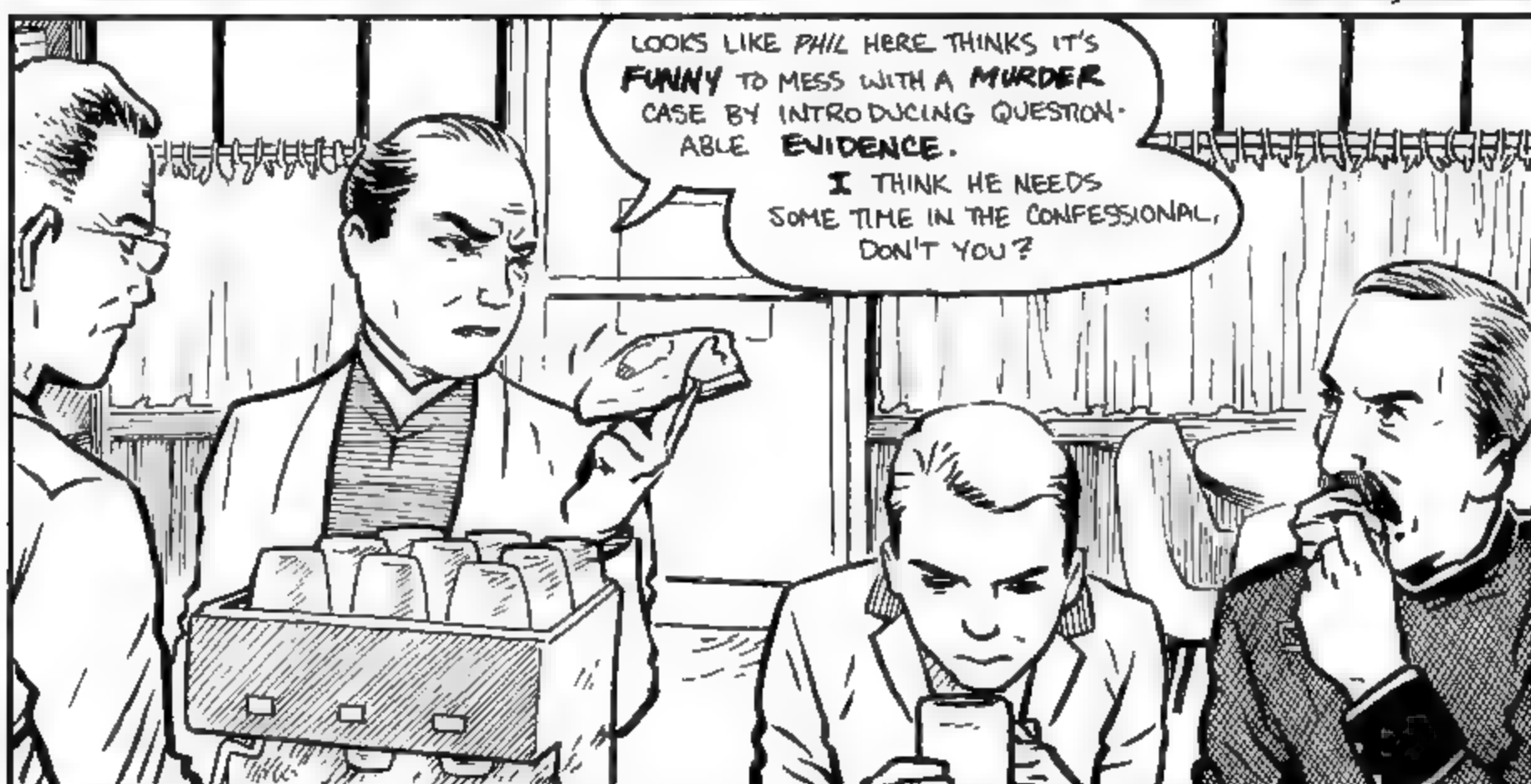
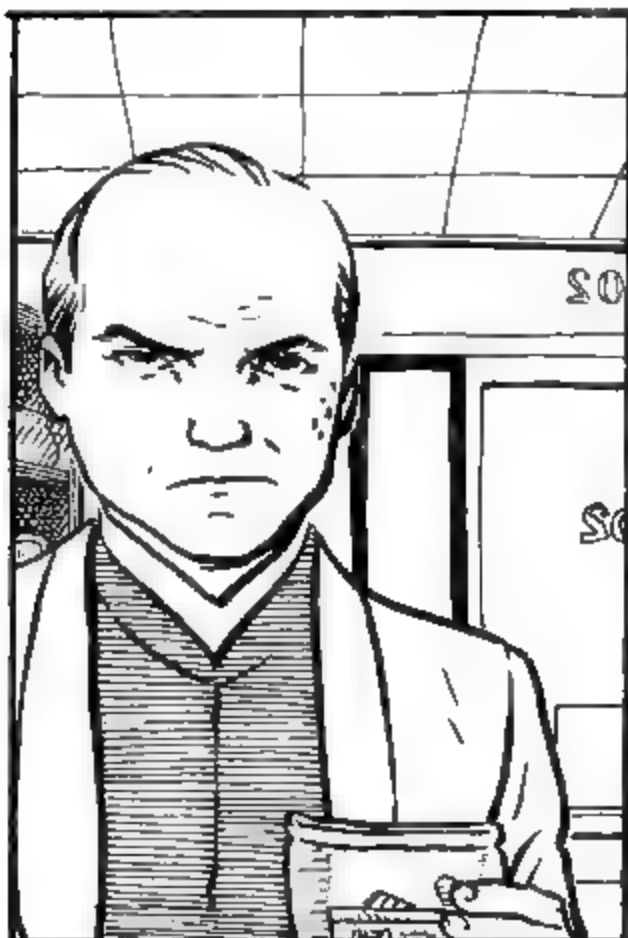
TOM ...

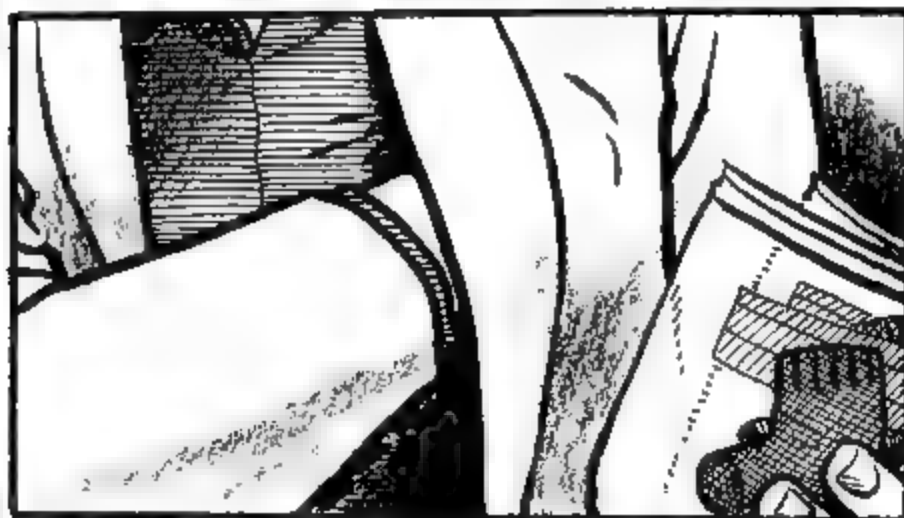
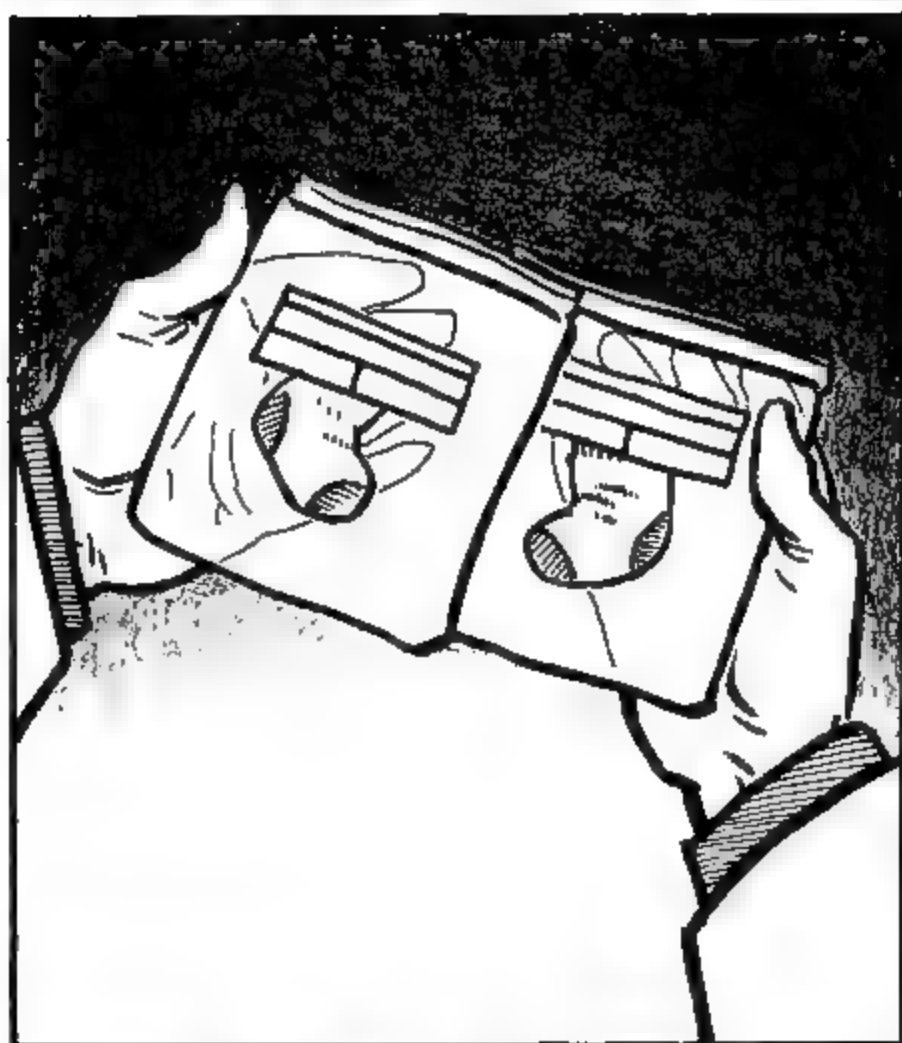
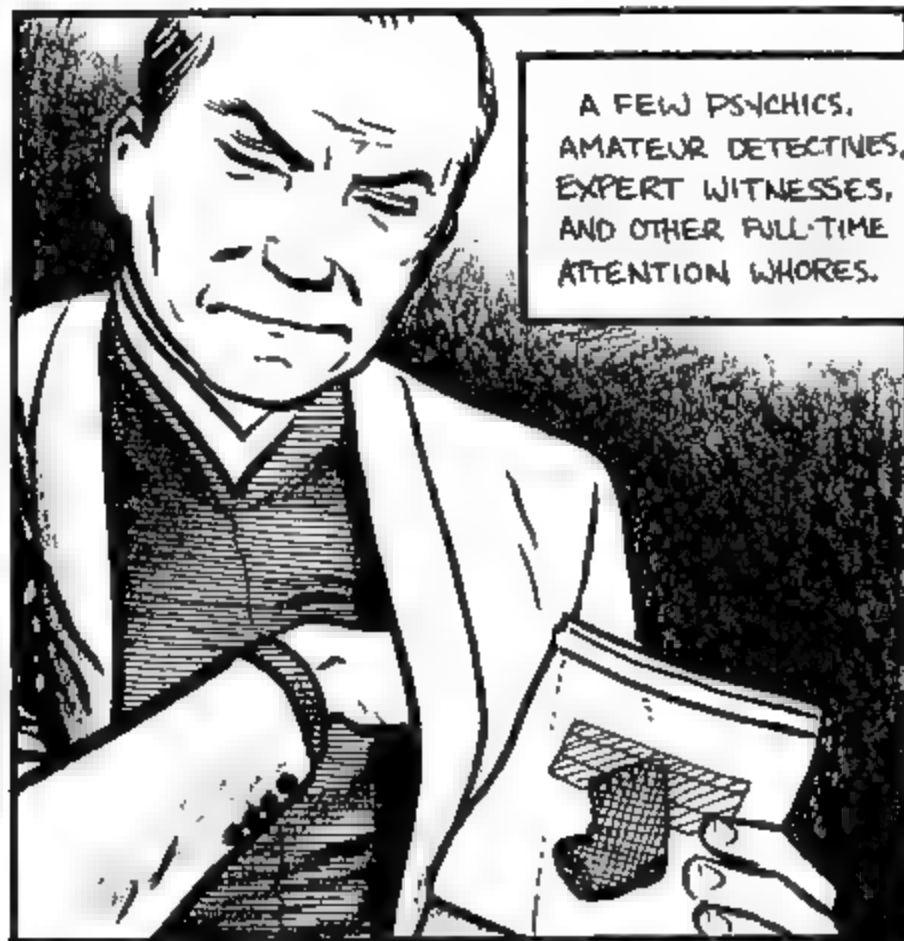
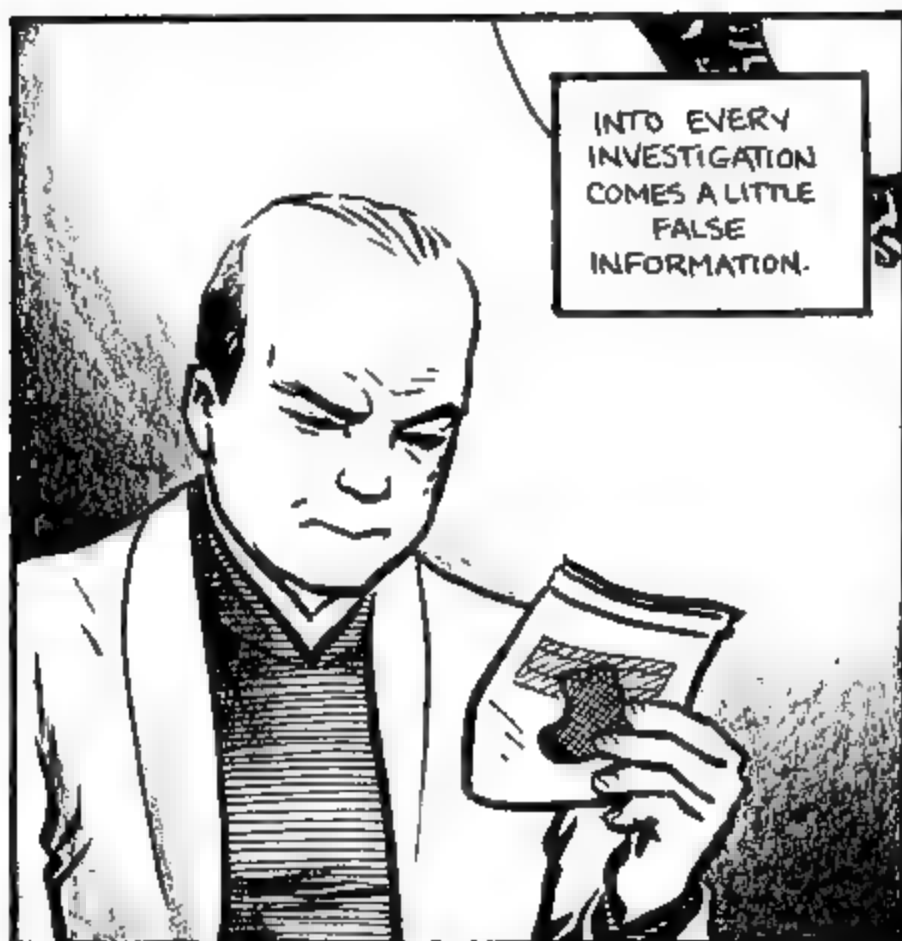
I TOOK CARE
OF THEM... I HAD
FAITH THAT SOMEONE
WOULD TAKE CARE
OF YOU...



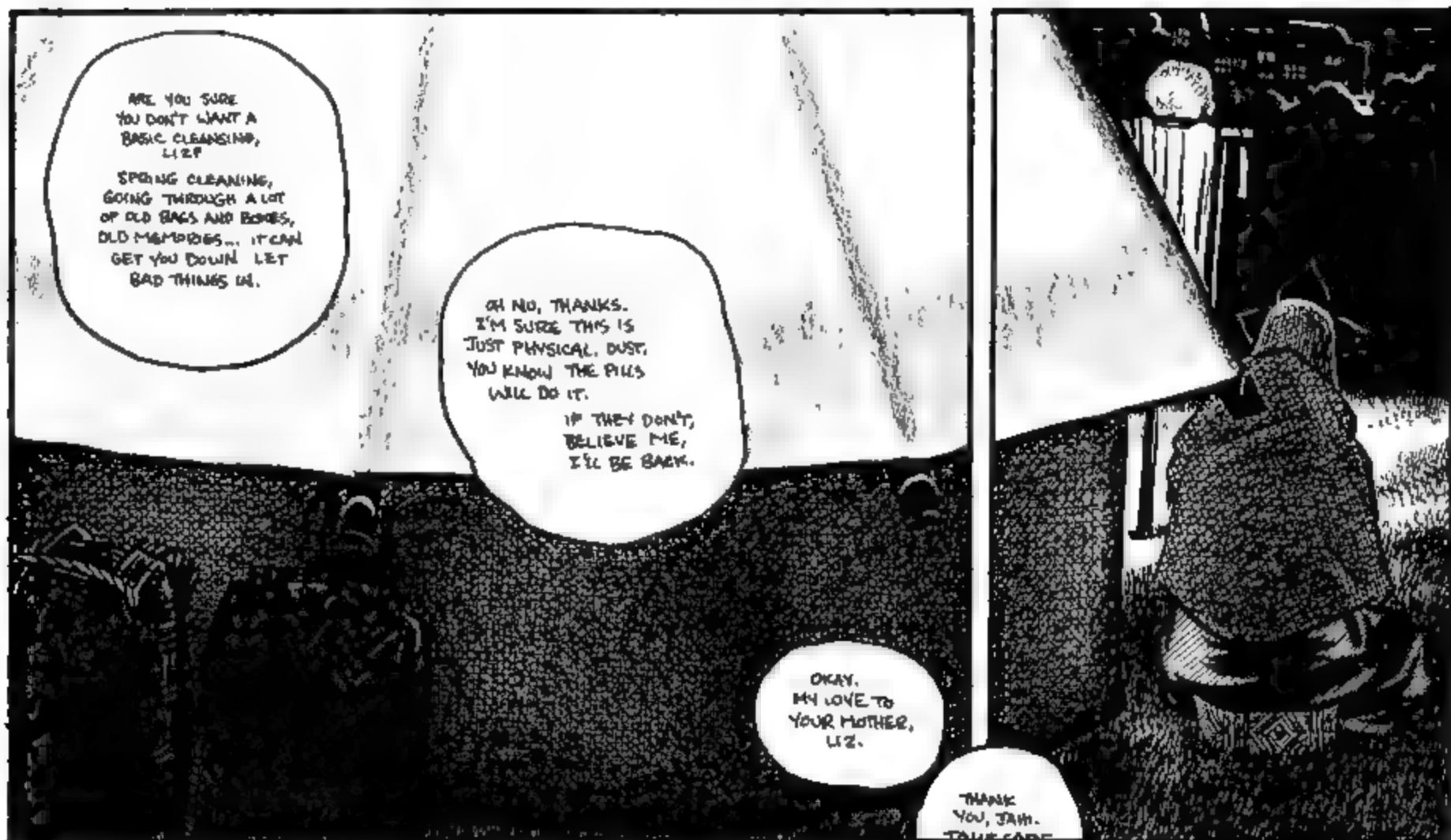


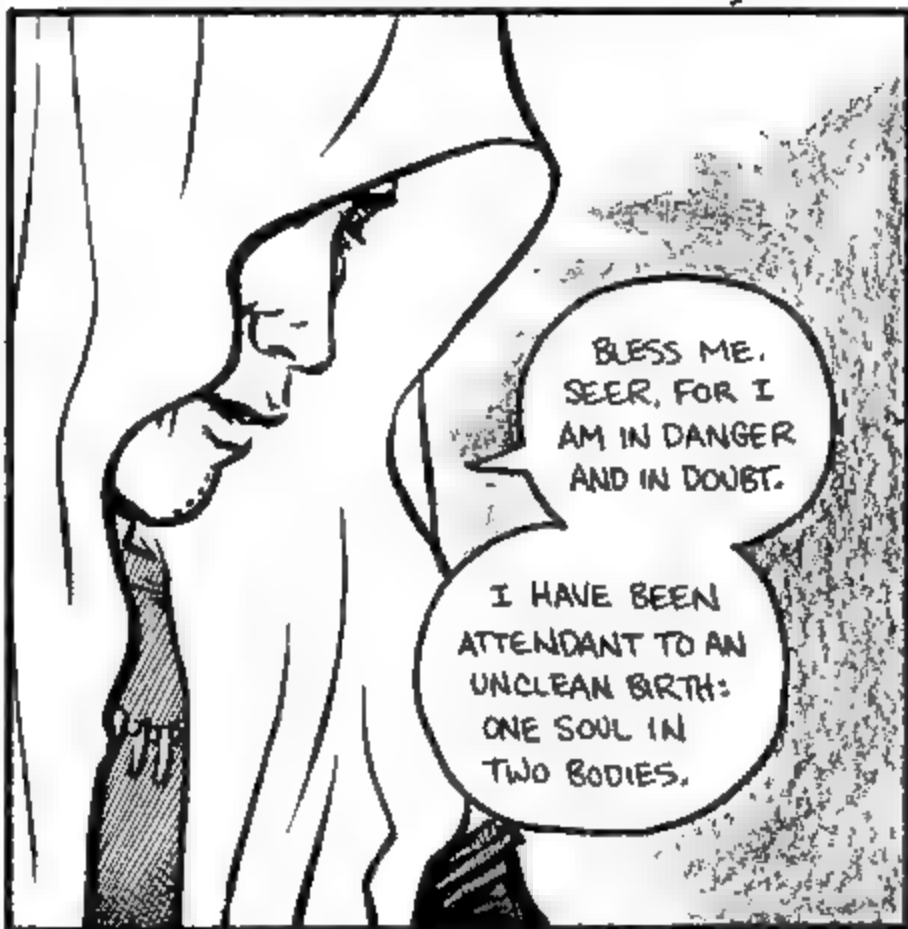


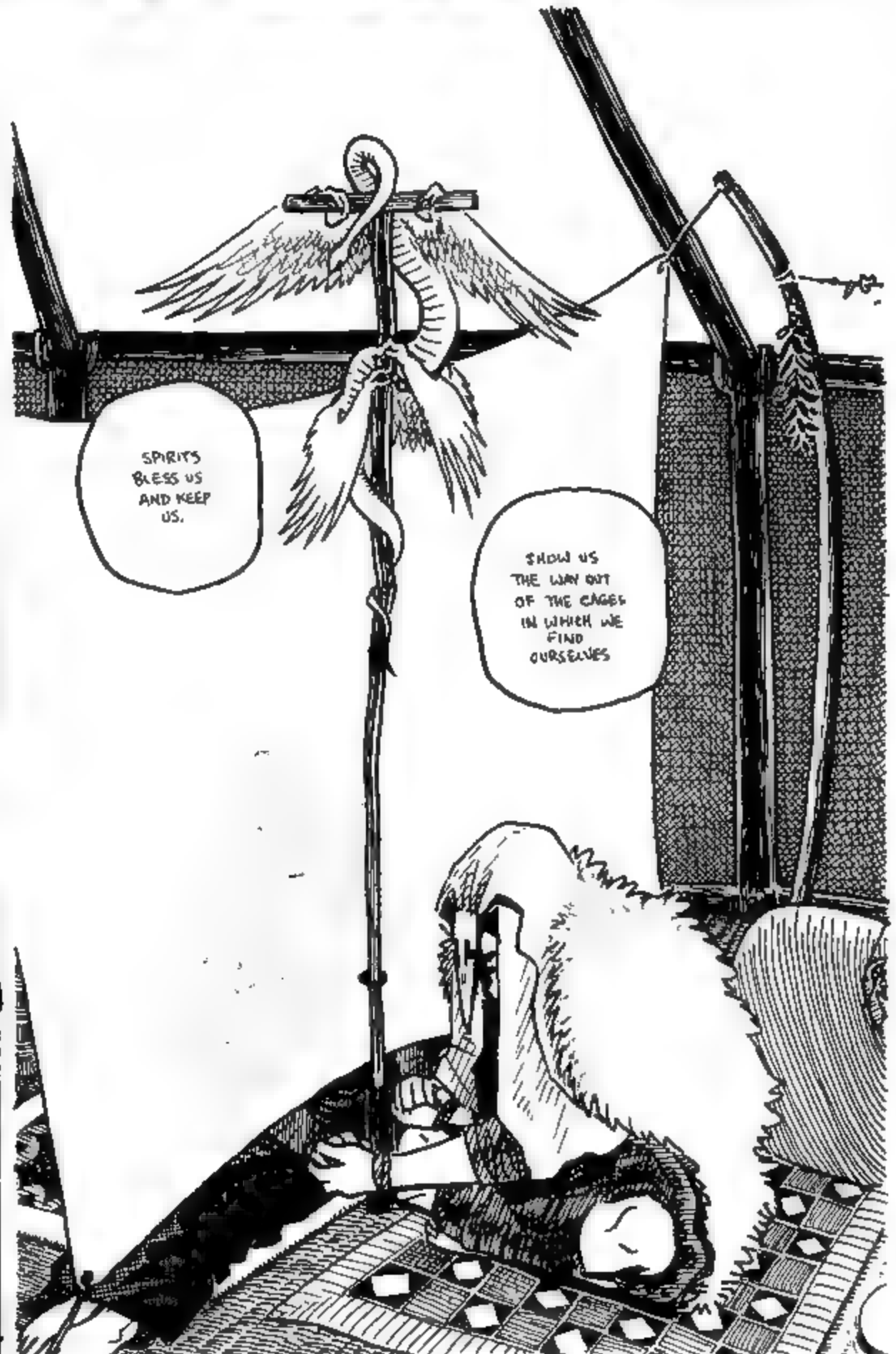




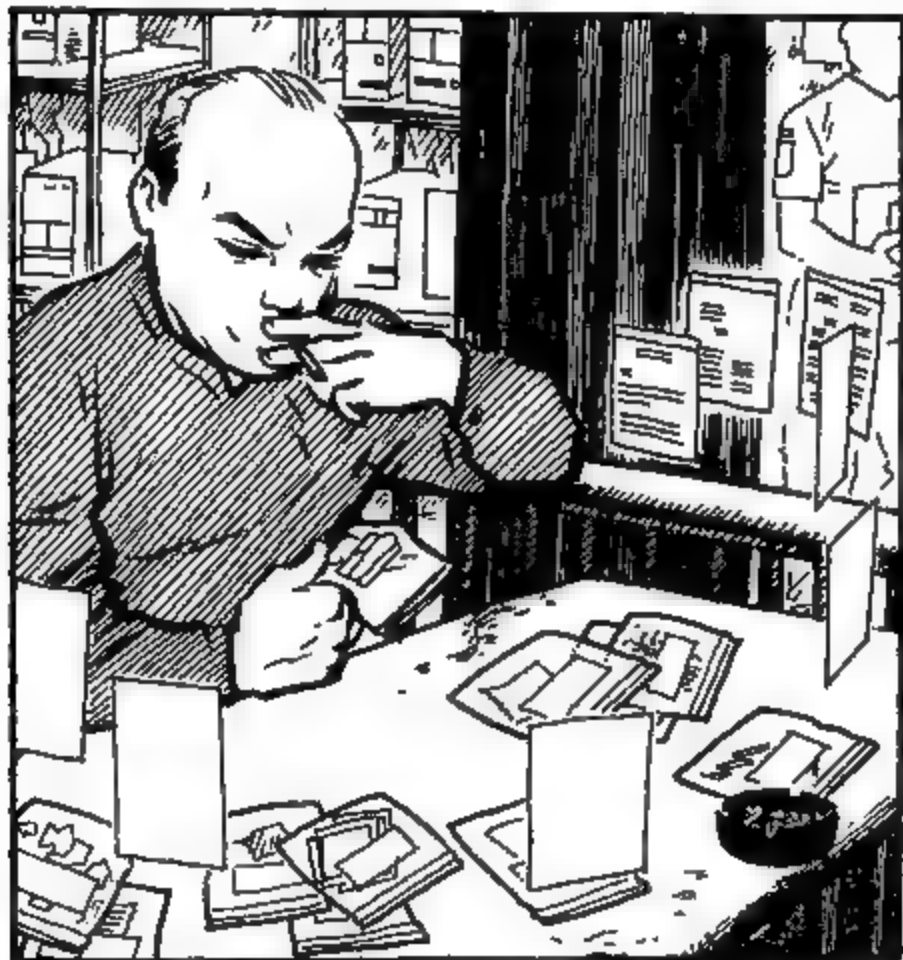








IT'S NOT AS IF THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN A LOCAL TRY TO DIRECT BLAME ONTO ANOTHER LOCAL. WHEN THE HAMMER'S RAISED, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEBODY WHO WANTS TO MAKE IT COME DOWN ON AN ENEMY.



BUT THIS--!

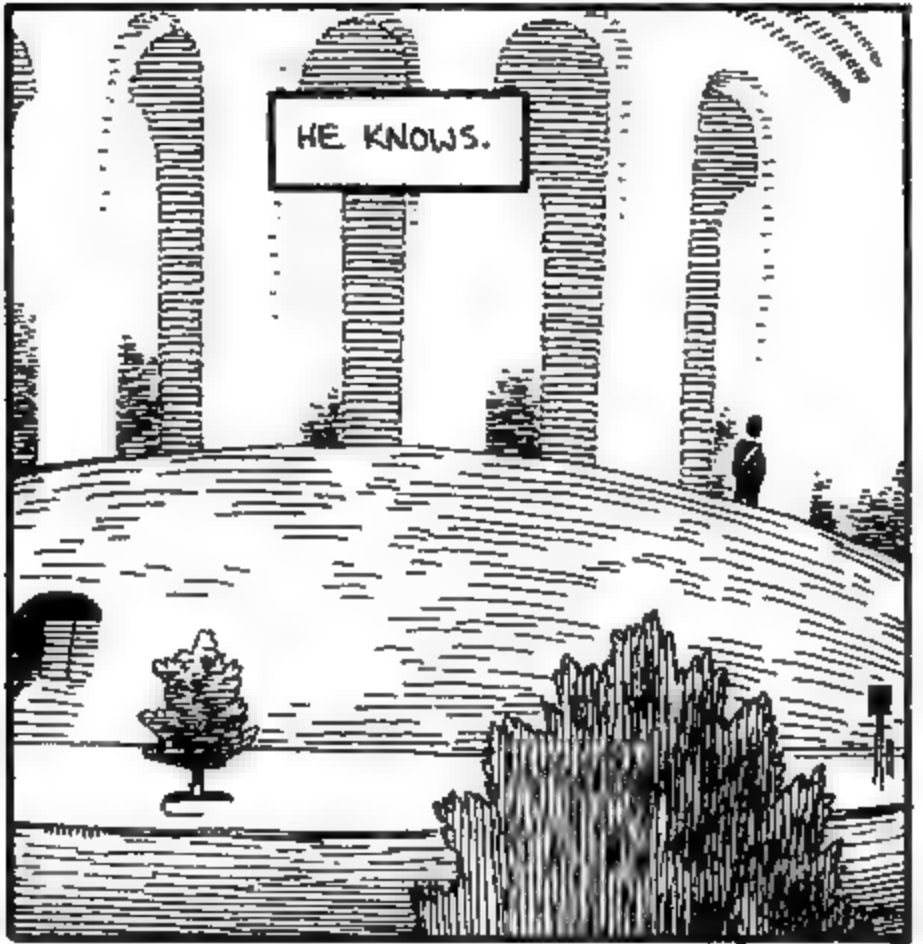
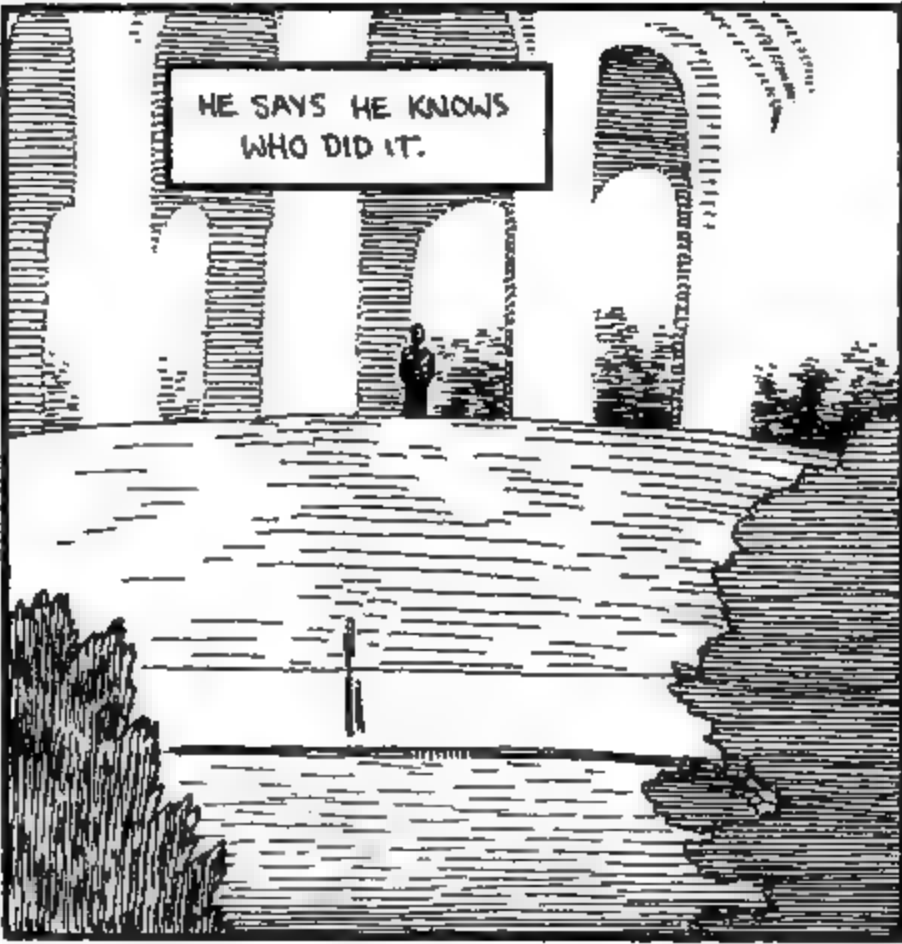
I TURN MY BACK AND ANOTHER HALF-DOZEN EVIDENCE BAGS, SCHOLARLY ARTICLES, AND TAPED-UP CUPS LAND ON MY DESK. ALL MATERIALS THAT POINT TO ONE MAN.

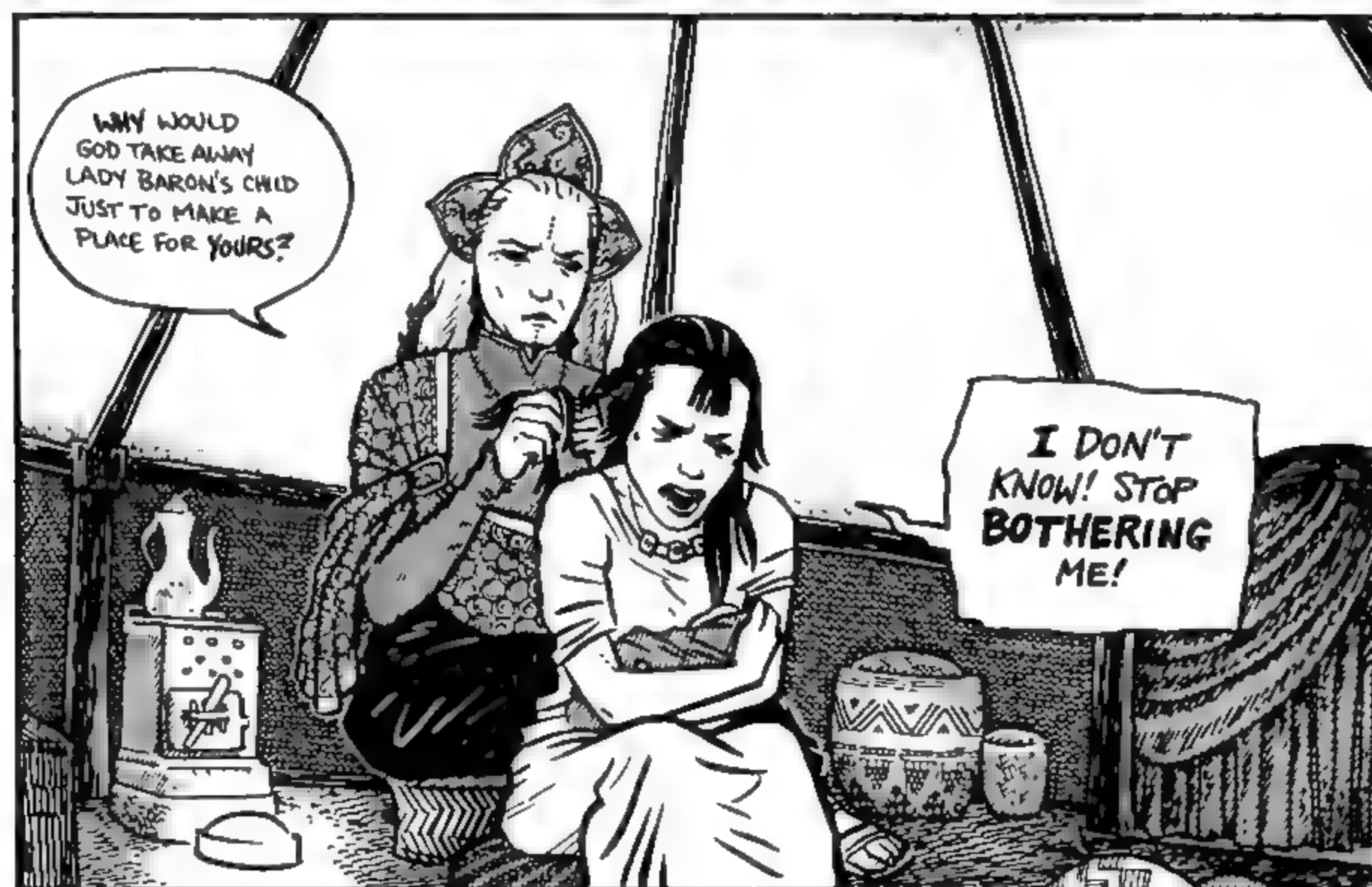
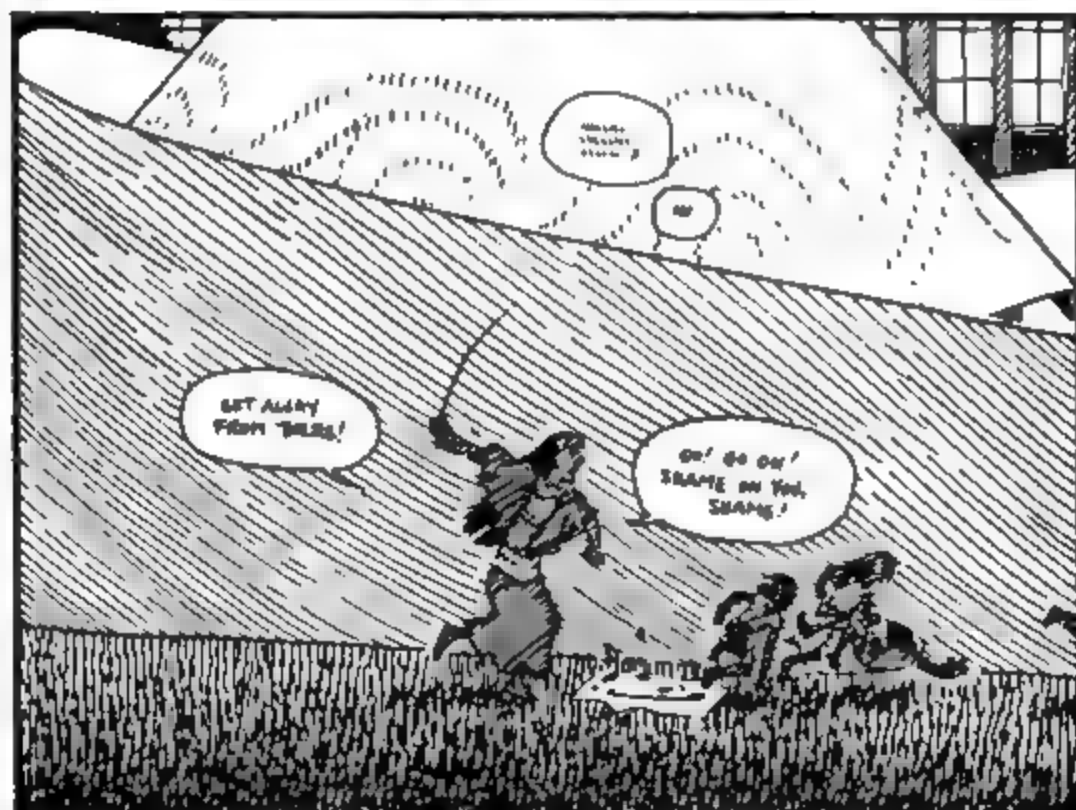
EVERYWHERE I GO PEOPLE STUFF THINGS INTO MY HANDS AND RUN. COFFEE-SHOP CLERKS, LAW-LIBRARY RUNNERS, STRANGERS ON THE STREET, EVEN A MORGUE NURSE!



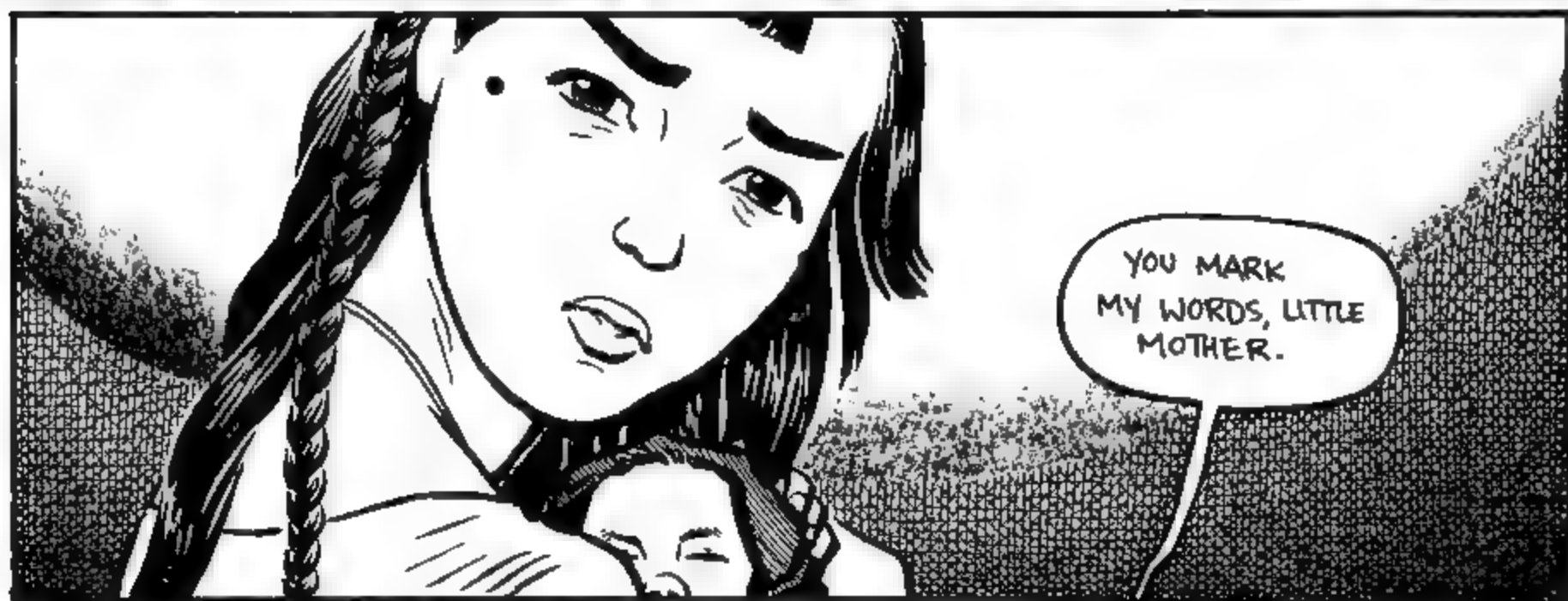
NONE OF THIS STUFF WAS COLLECTED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT. OFFICIALLY IT'S ALL "ANONYMOUS TIPS."

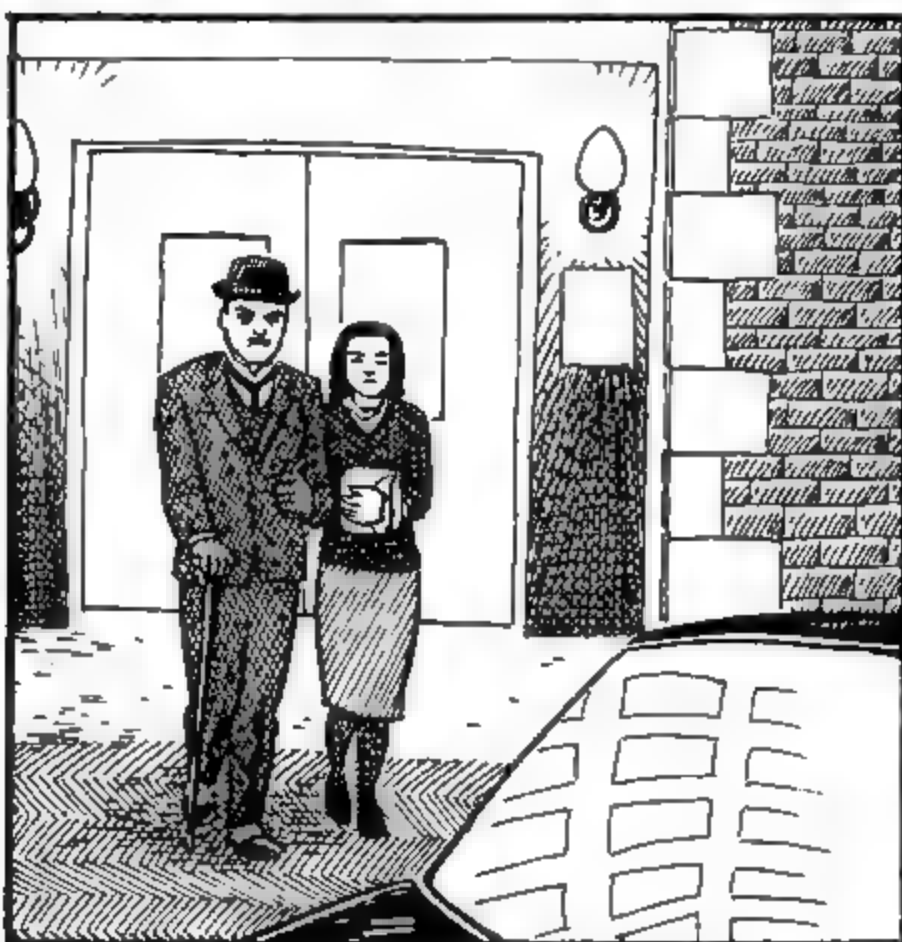
ULTIMATELY IT ALL COMES FROM THAT ONE CREEP.

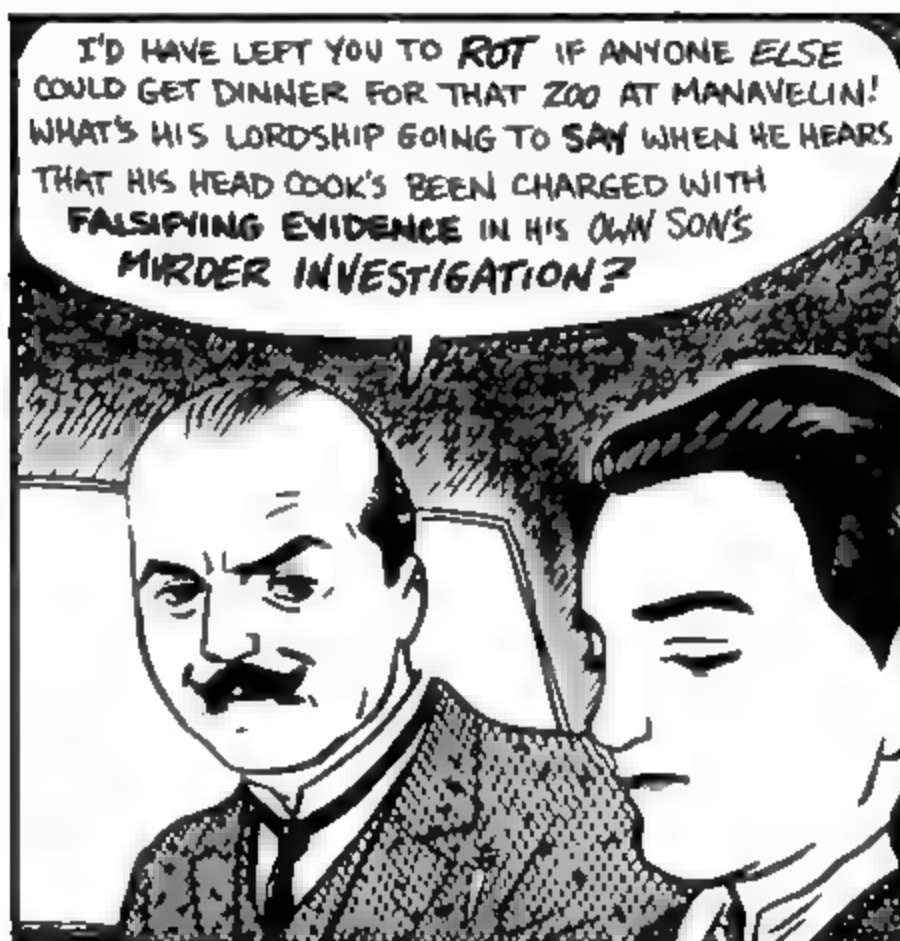
















--AND THEY ALL
TURNED AWAY
FROM HER LIKE
SHE WAS A
LEPER!



IT'S JUST LIKE IT SAYS IN
ALL THOSE BOOKS ON ASCIANS THAT
**YOU SAY ARE BULLSHIT! THEY'RE
AFRAID OF WOMAN'S POWER!**



THEY--WE'RE SUPPOSED TO REVERE
BIRTH AND FERTILITY AND ALL THAT
STUFF. BUT THEY TREAT THE ACTUAL
WOMAN LIKE SHE'S A **DISEASE!** THEY
HAVEN'T SEEN HER FOR DAYS AND DAYS
AND DAYS THANKS TO THAT CRAZY "TIME
OF CONFINEMENT" THING, THEY HAVEN'T
SEEN HER BABY AT **ALL--** MY AUNT PEG
GOT A BETTER RECEPTION WHEN SHE
GAVE BIRTH AND WE ALL **HATE HER!**

BUT THIS **POOR GIRL,**
THEY WON'T EVEN LOOK
AT HER!



IT'S **STUPID!**
ALL THESE RULES AND
CUSTOMS AND TABOOS
ARE JUST **STUPID!**

WHY IS IT
LIKE THIS??







bergtätte









IT WILL BE
ALL RIGHT,
LOHENA.



THIS PLACE ISN'T HELL.
IT HAS ITS PATHS. IT'S JUST
ANOTHER FOREST.

A WOOD,
YES?

MADE
OF WOOD.



COME
ON, NOW.





OKAY.



SWOOP



EXPLAIN
THAT
REMARK.



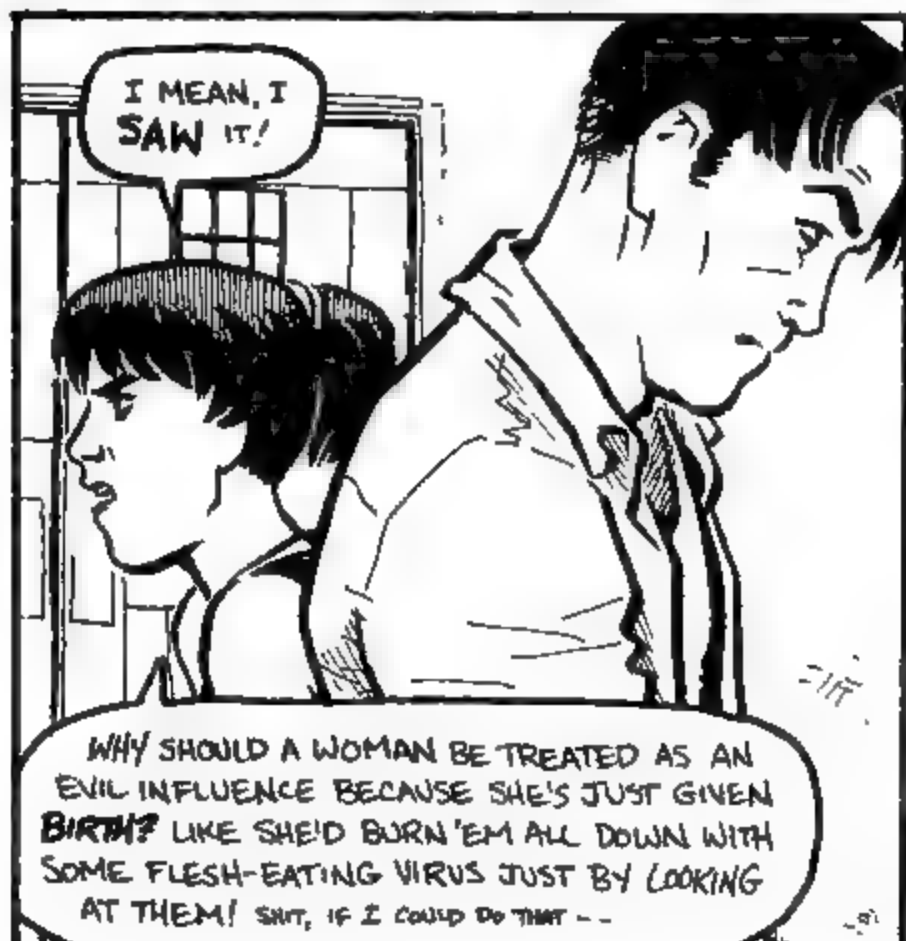
HM?

DON'T DO THAT. YOU KNOW
WHAT YOU SAID. I'M
TALKING ABOUT MISOGYNY
AND YOU SAY I DON'T
KNOW LOVE WHEN
I SEE IT.



OKAY. I'M
STUPID.
EXPLAIN.

YOU'RE NOT
STUPID, LINDA,
YOU'RE JUST--



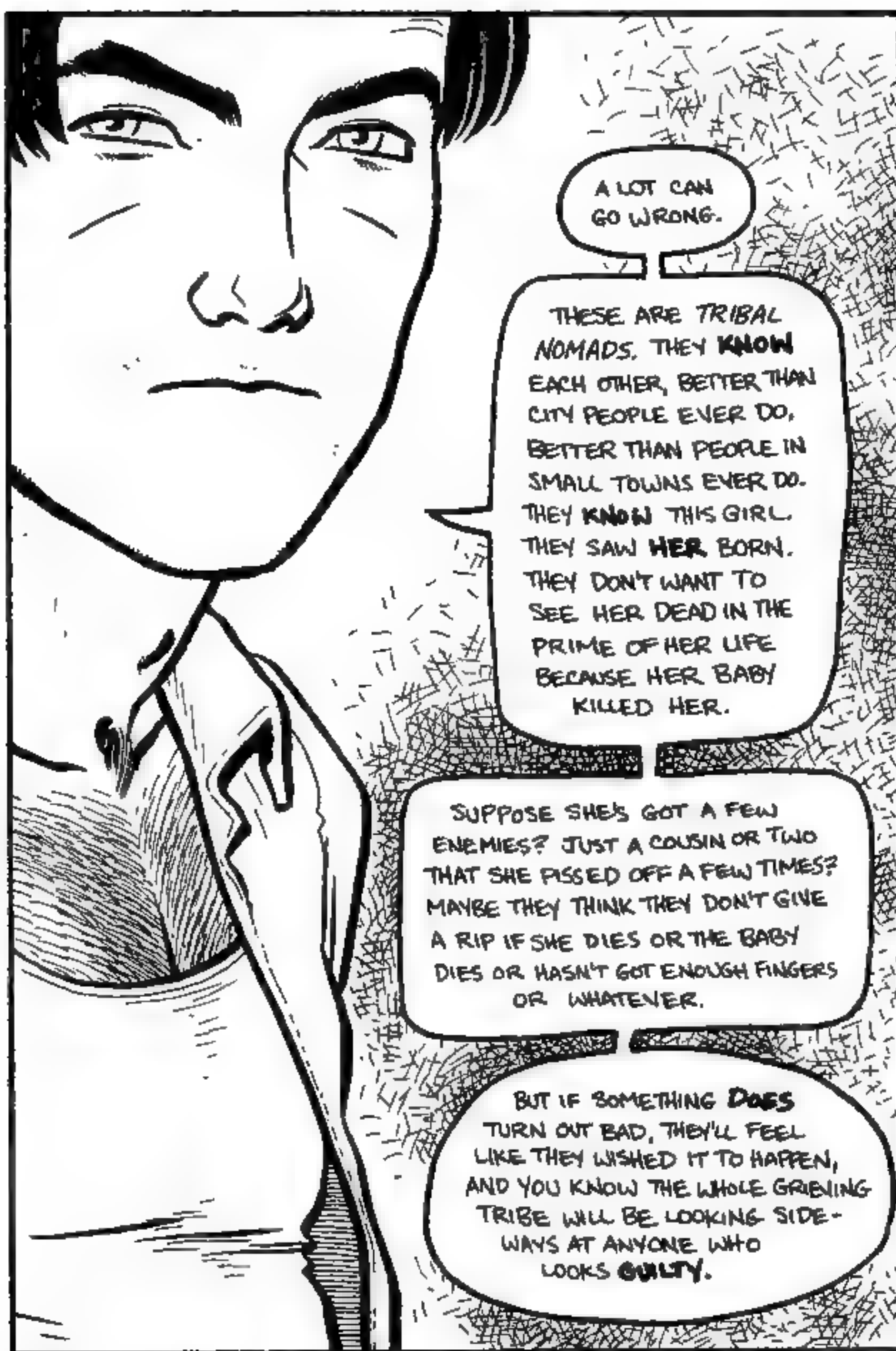
I MEAN, I
SAW IT!

WHY SHOULD A WOMAN BE TREATED AS AN
EVIL INFLUENCE BECAUSE SHE'S JUST GIVEN
BIRTH? LIKE SHE'D BURN 'EM ALL DOWN WITH
SOME FLESH-EATING VIRUS JUST BY LOOKING
AT THEM! SHIT, IF I COULD DO THAT --



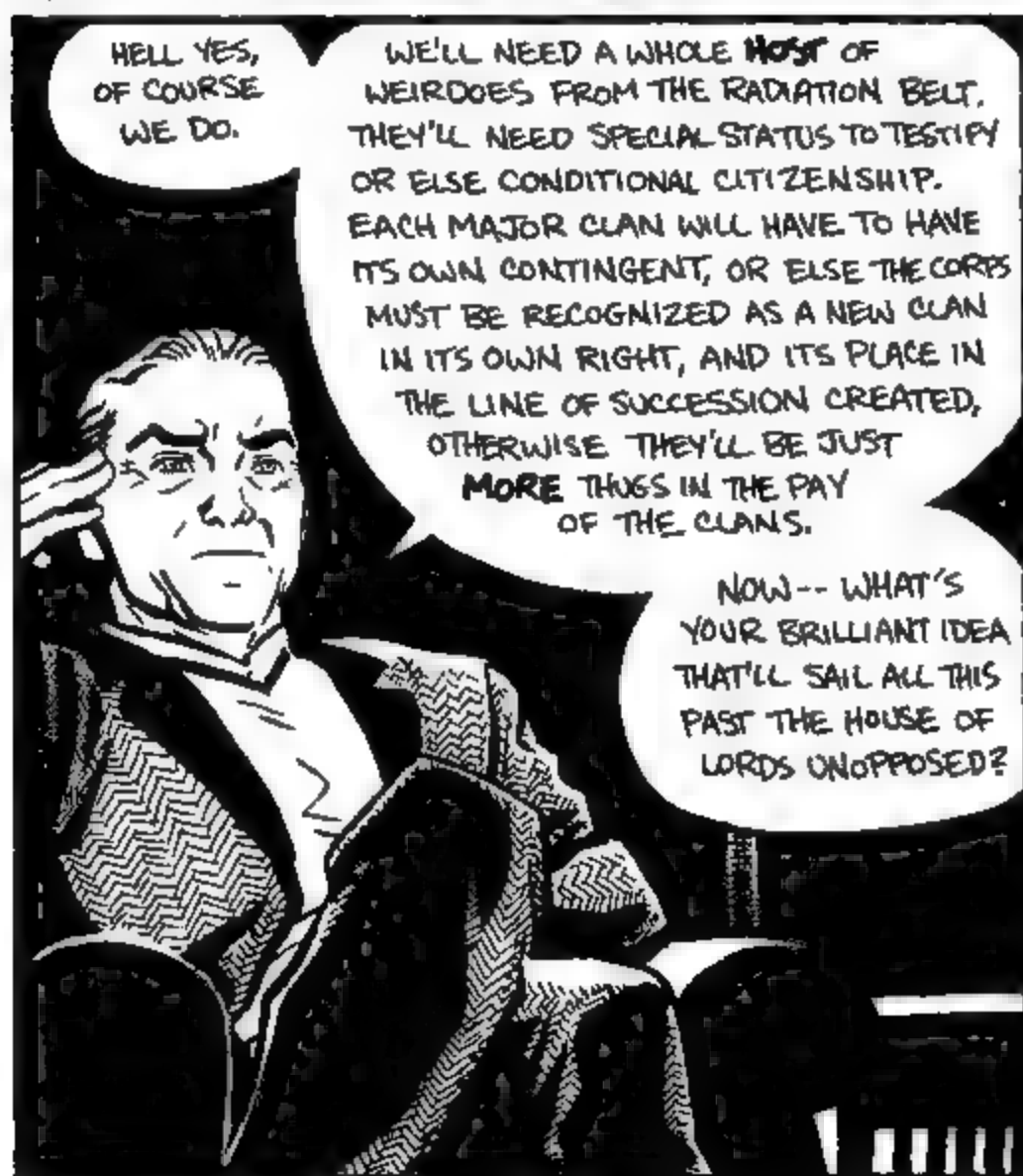
A LOT CAN GO WRONG WITH
WOMEN HAVING BABIES. I WATCHED
A CLOSE FRIEND DIE IN CHILDBIRTH.

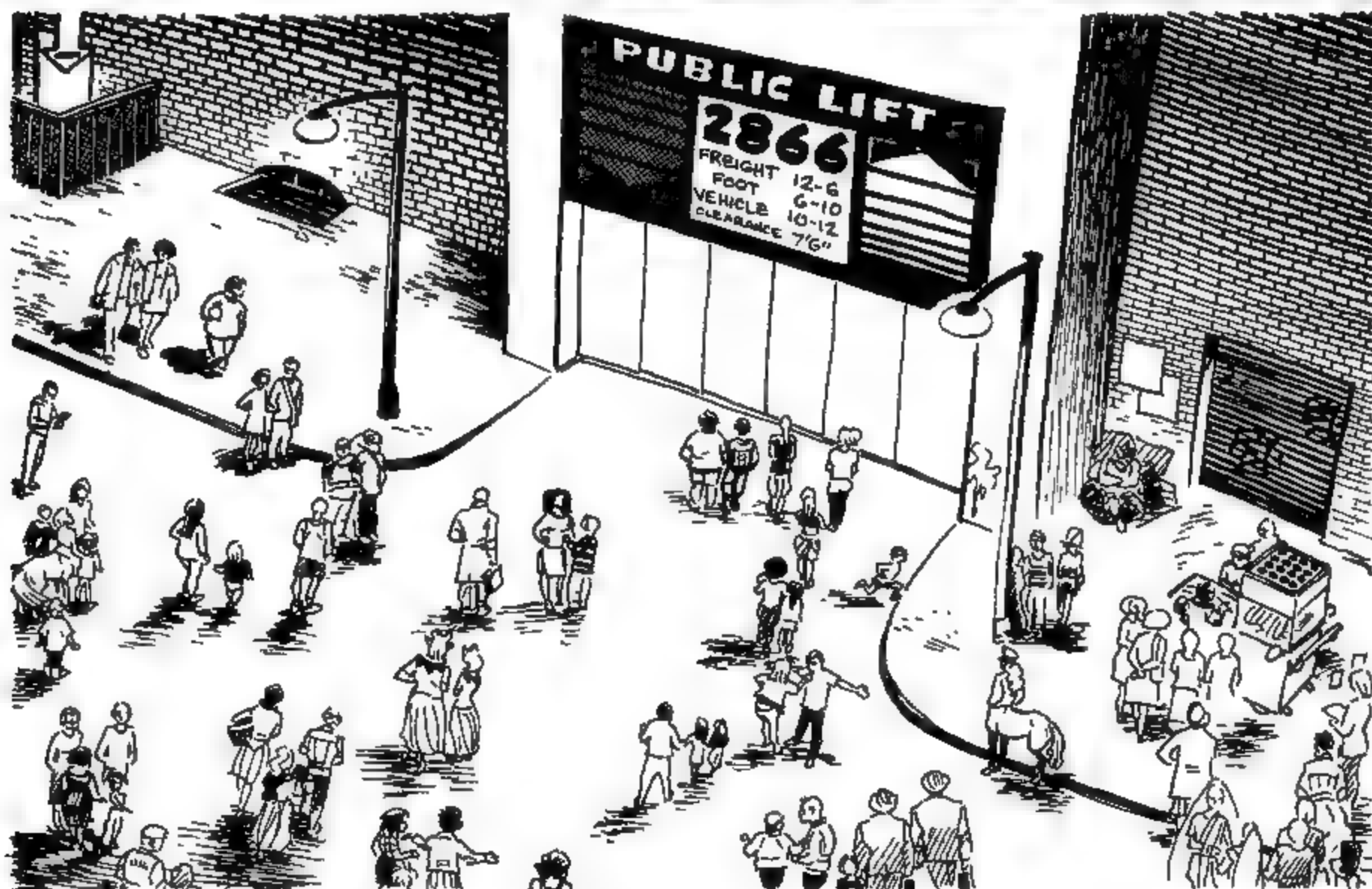
ONE MINUTE SHE WAS FINE. NEXT
SHE JUST... BLEED OUT. PLACENTA DIDN'T
COME OUT RIGHT, AND A PLACENTA'S
JOB IS TO PUMP BLOOD.

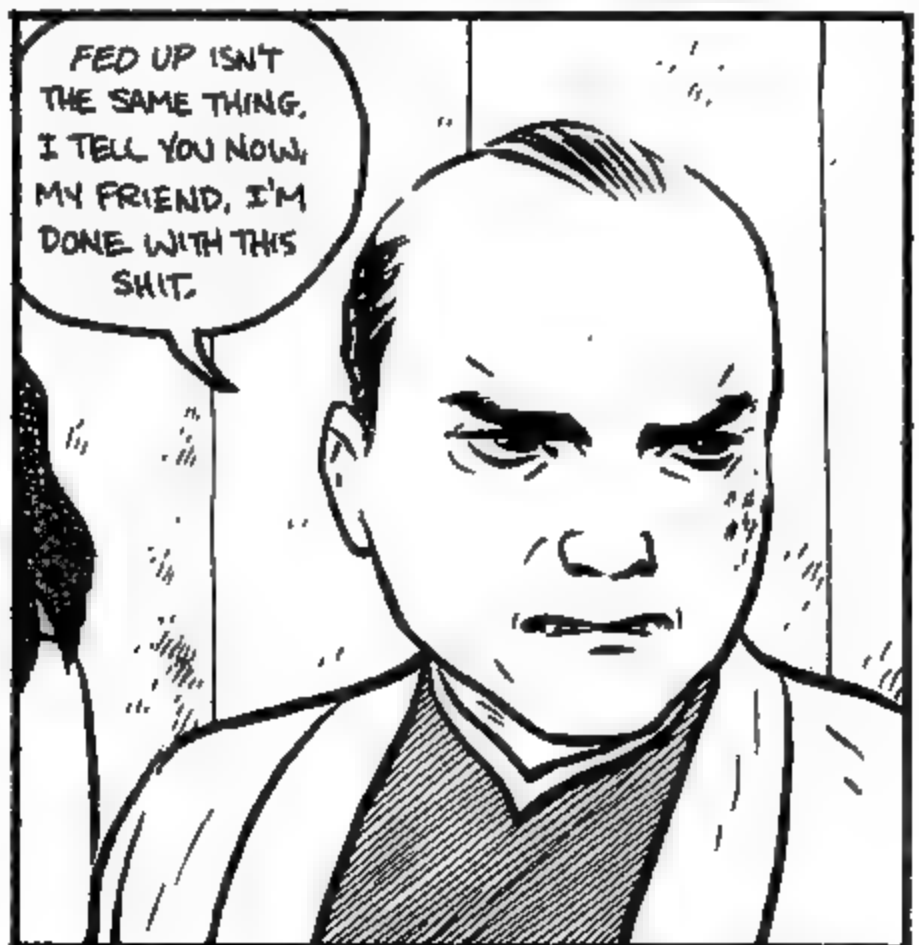


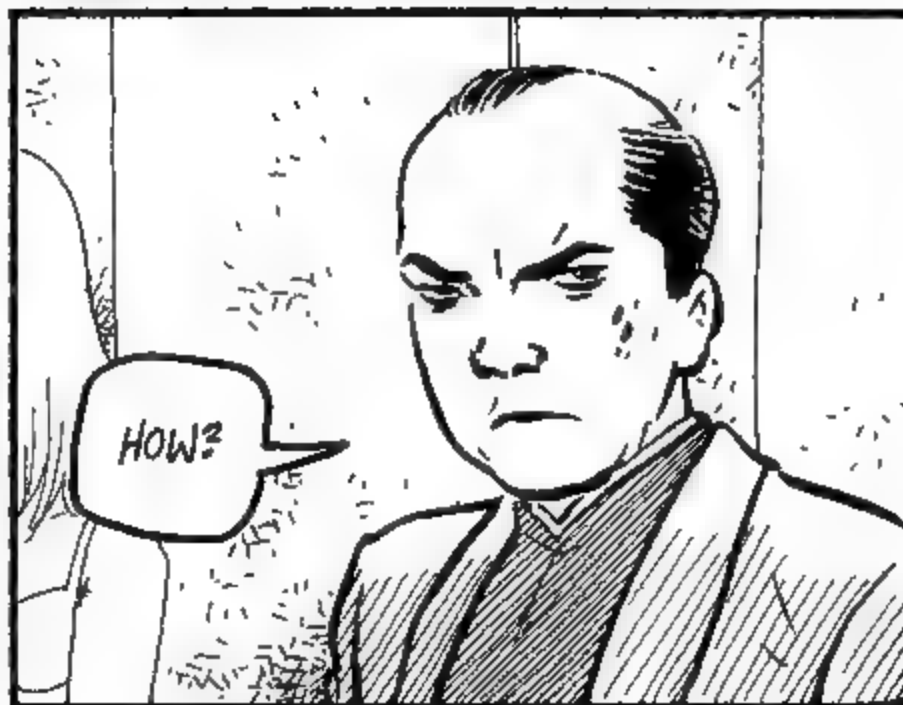
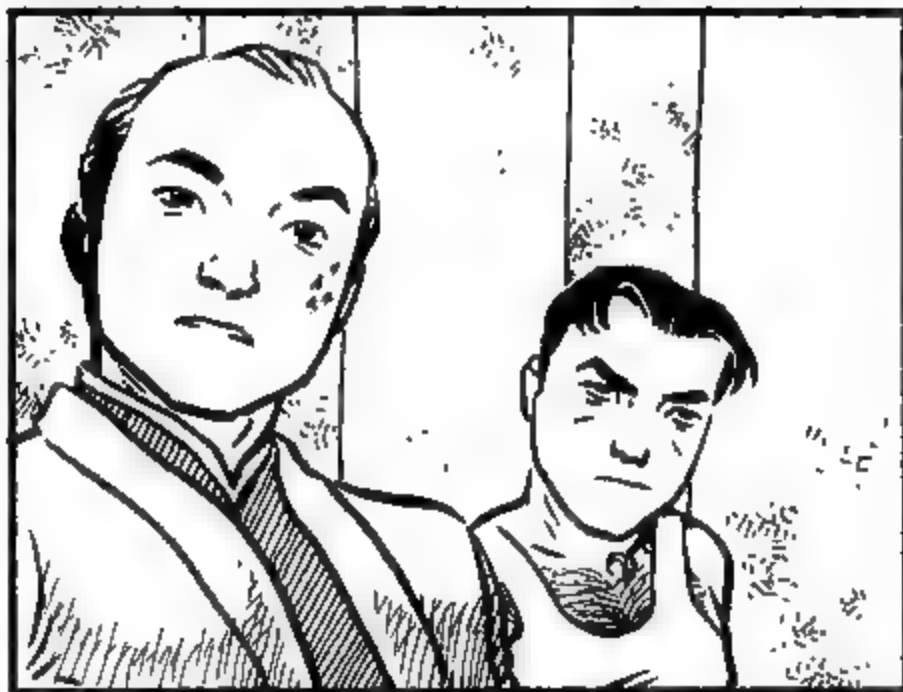
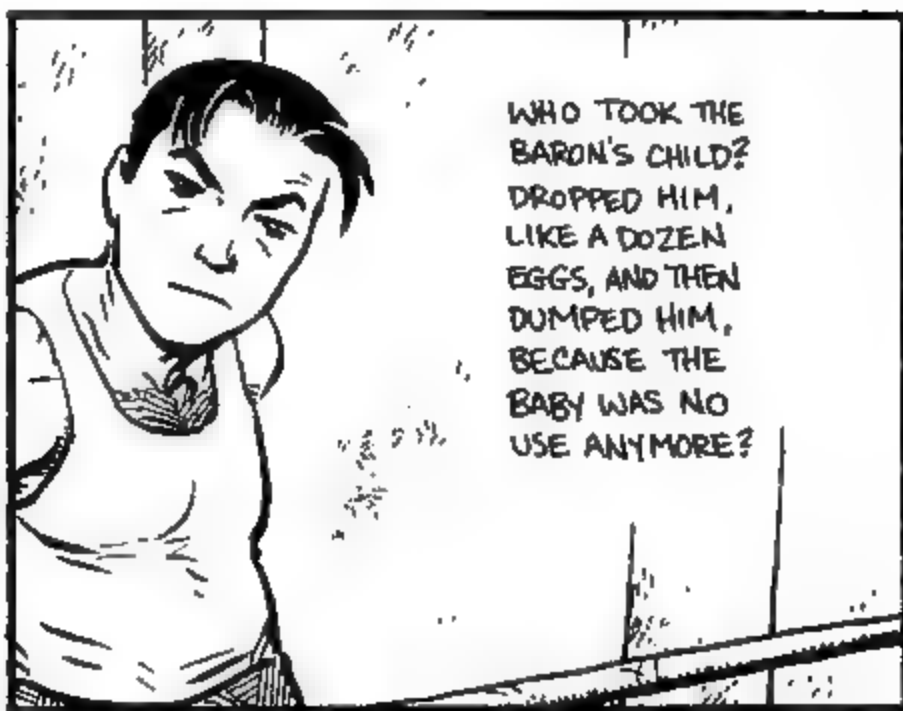
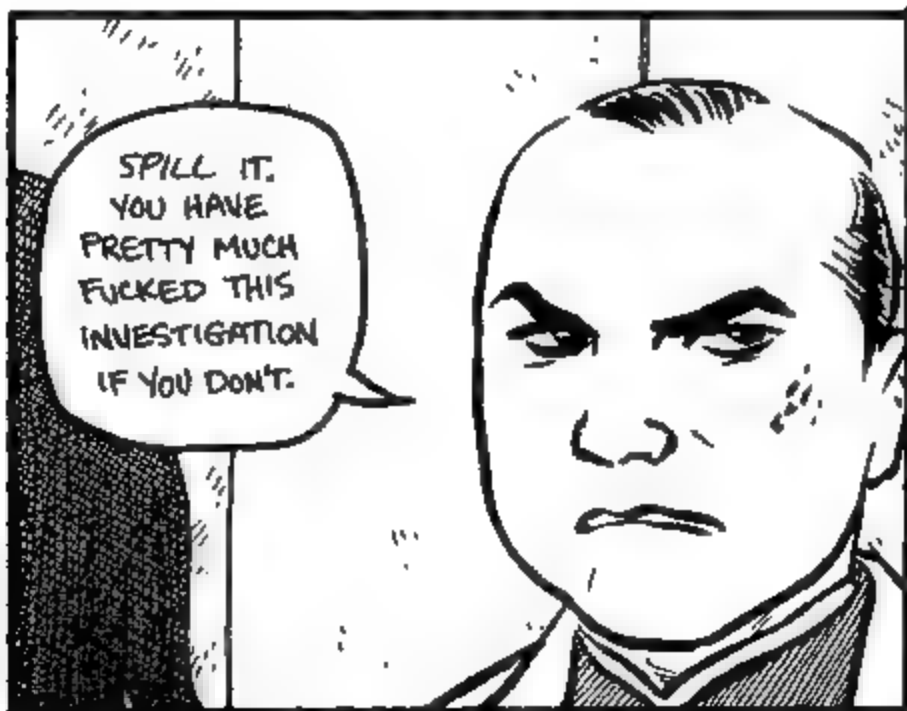


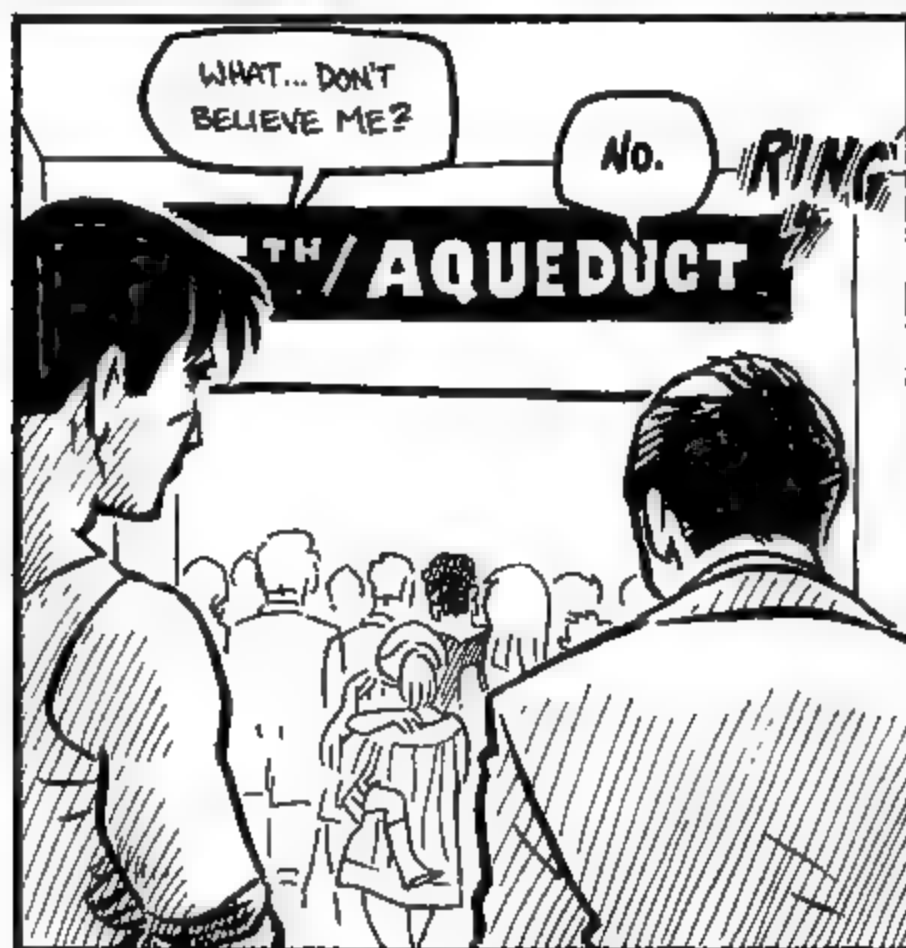


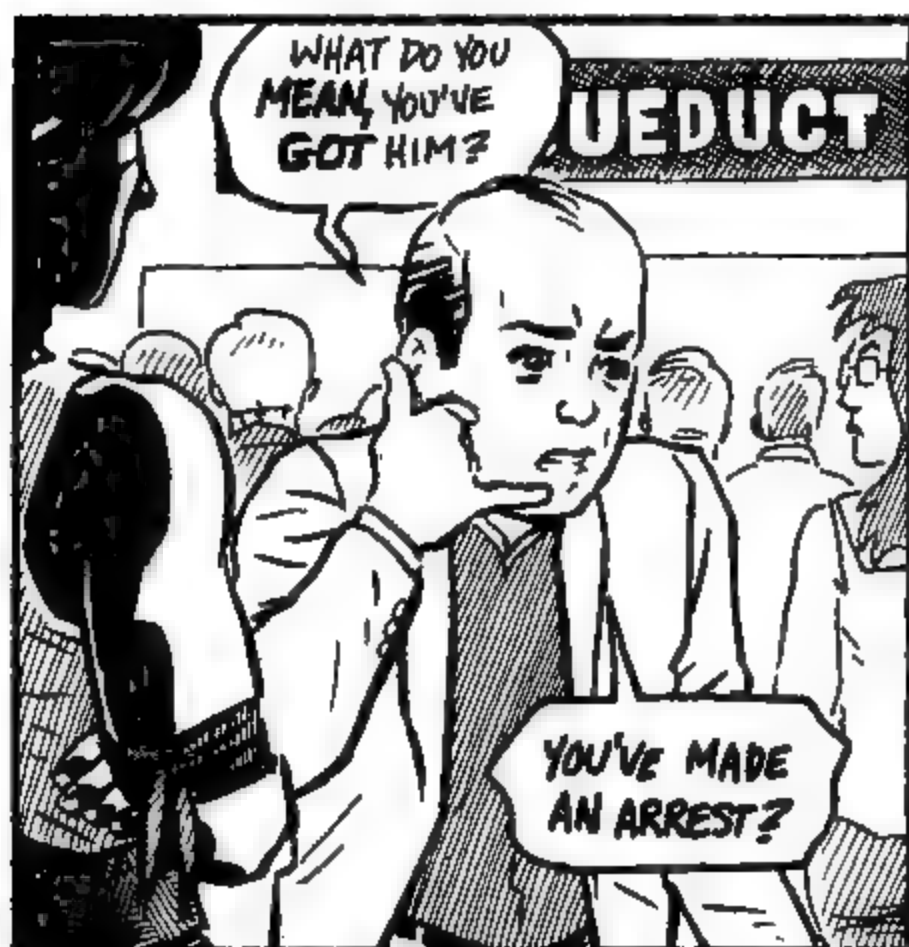






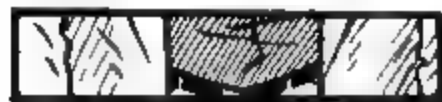


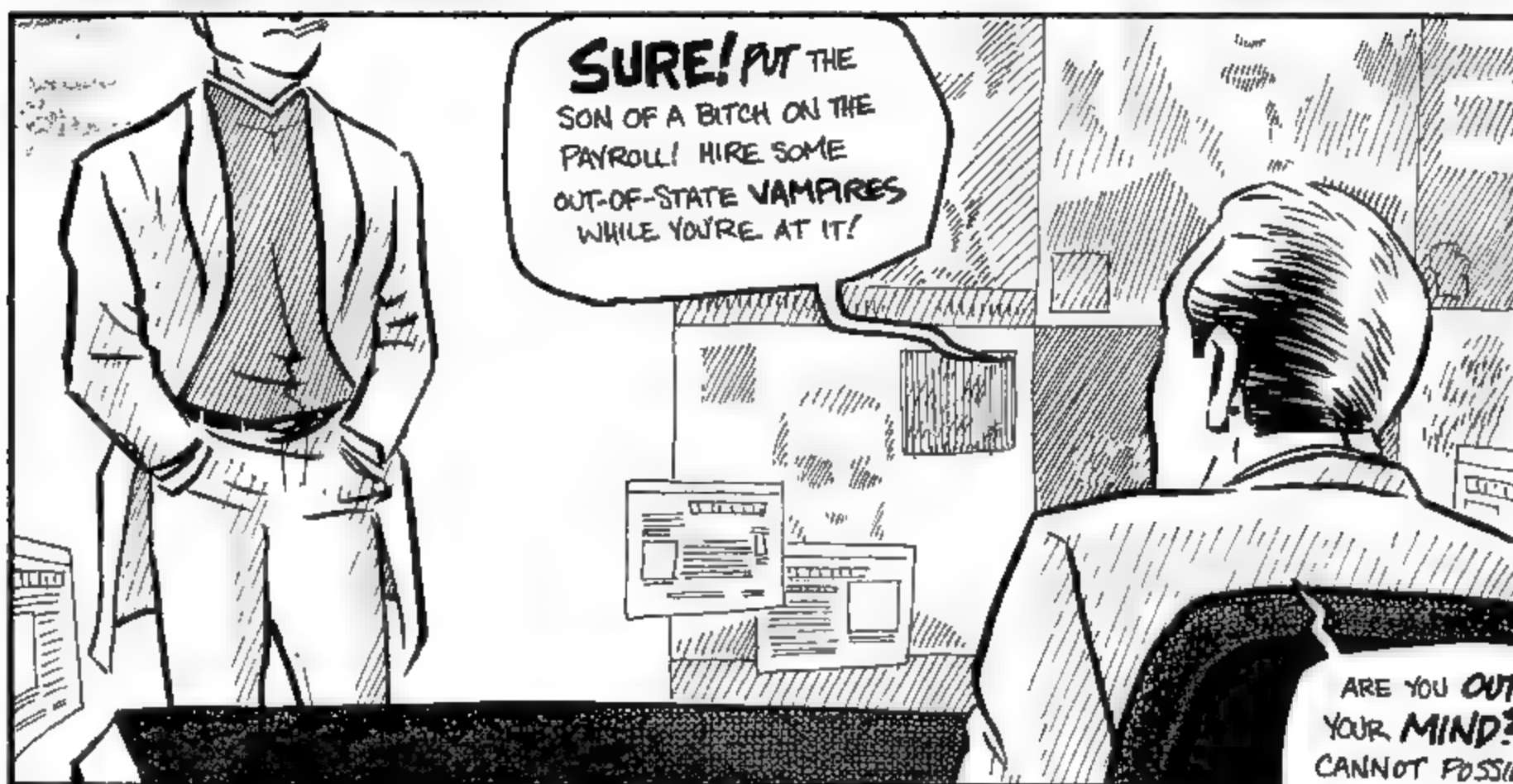
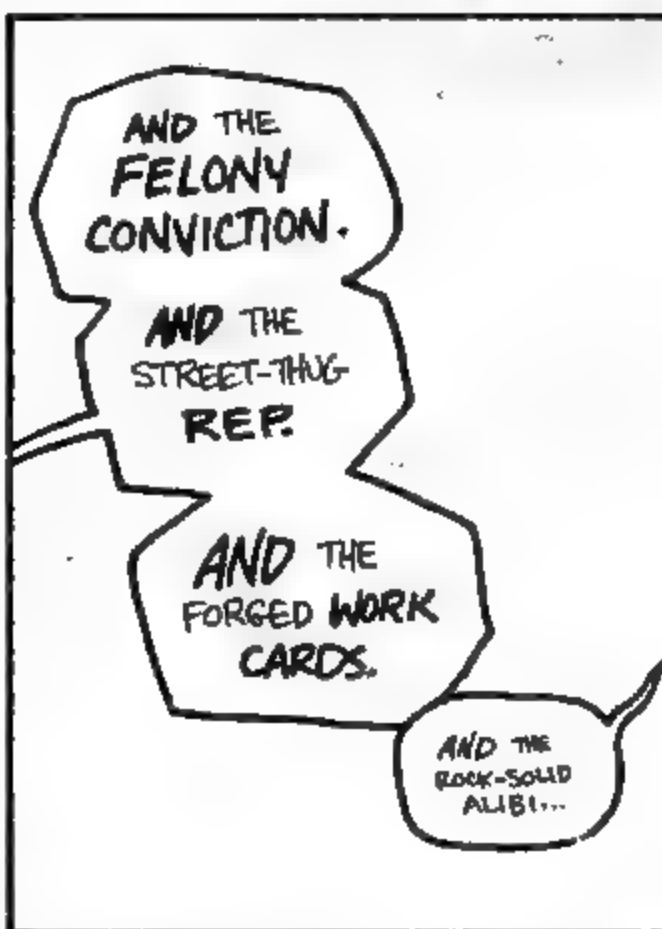
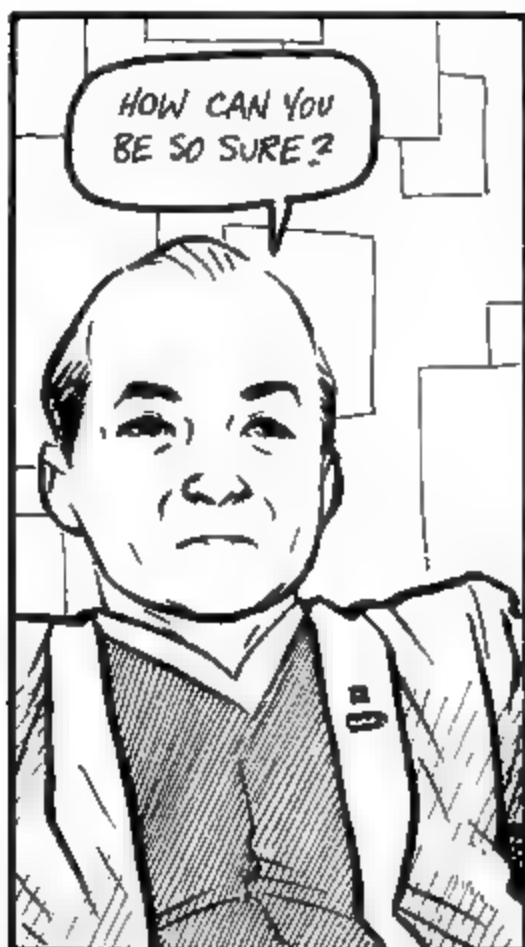


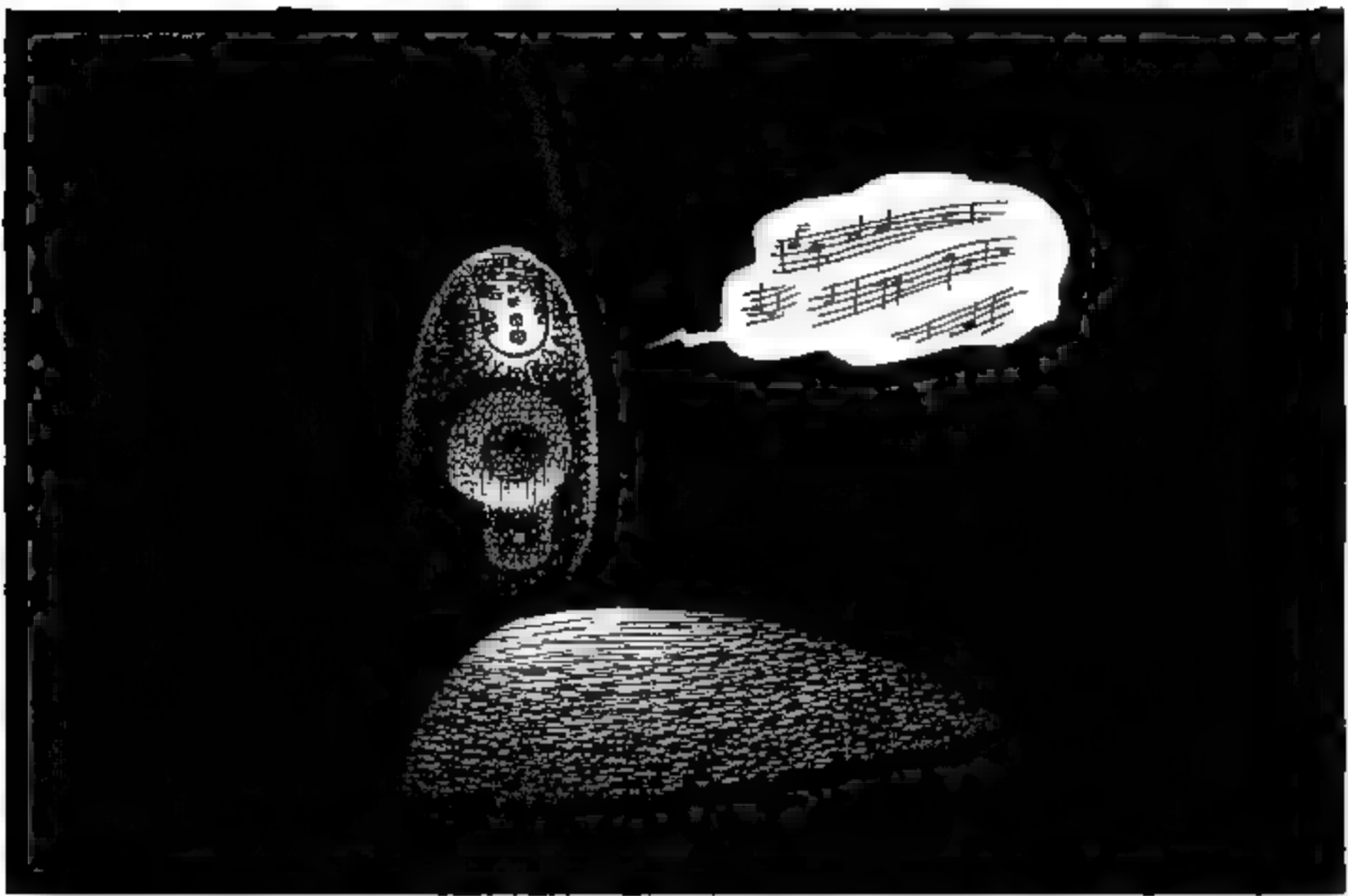


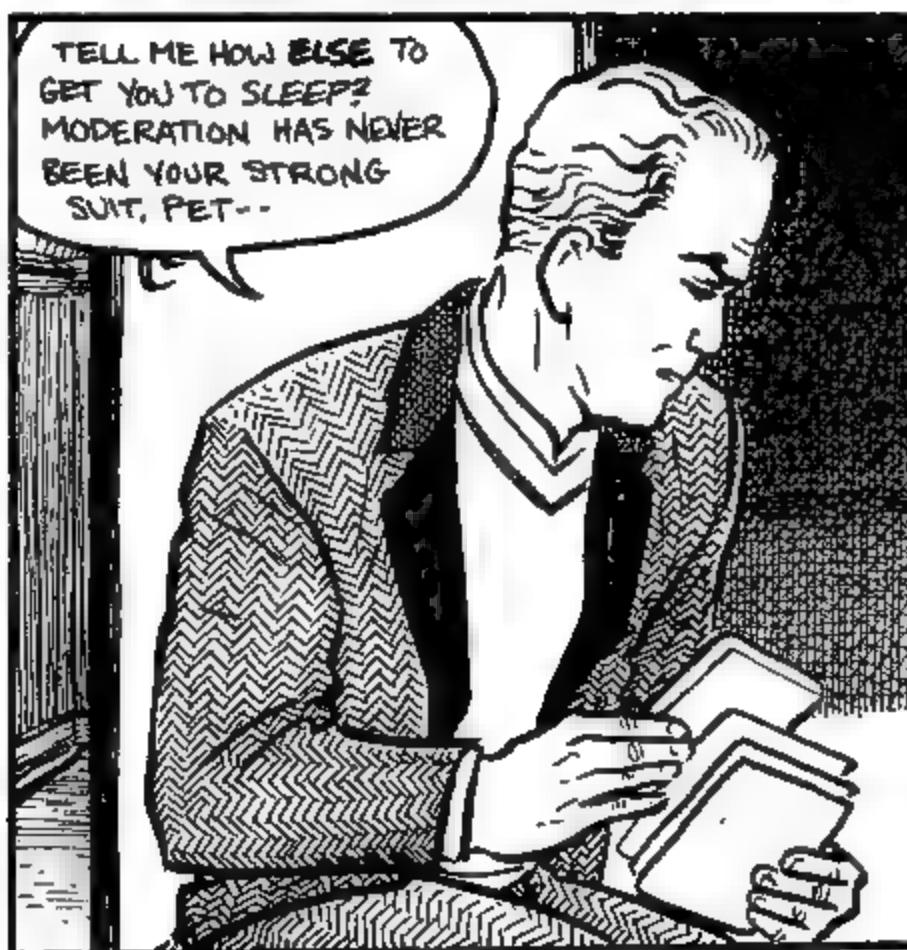
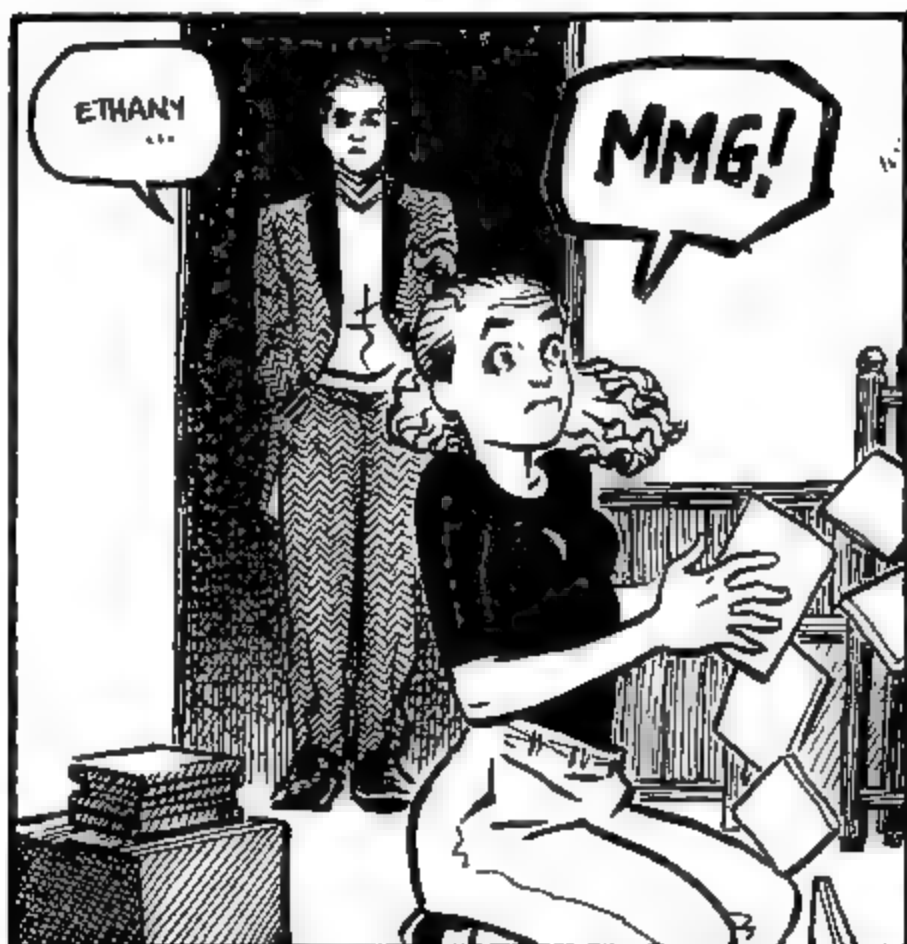


"LURED THE DECEASED'S NIGHT NURSE, AGNESYA MCCAIG, AWAY FROM HER POST JUST AS THE ARTIFICIAL SKY WAS DIMMED FOR DRAMATIC EFFECT WHEN LORD AND LADY LOCKRUM ENTERED THE PARTY HALL"

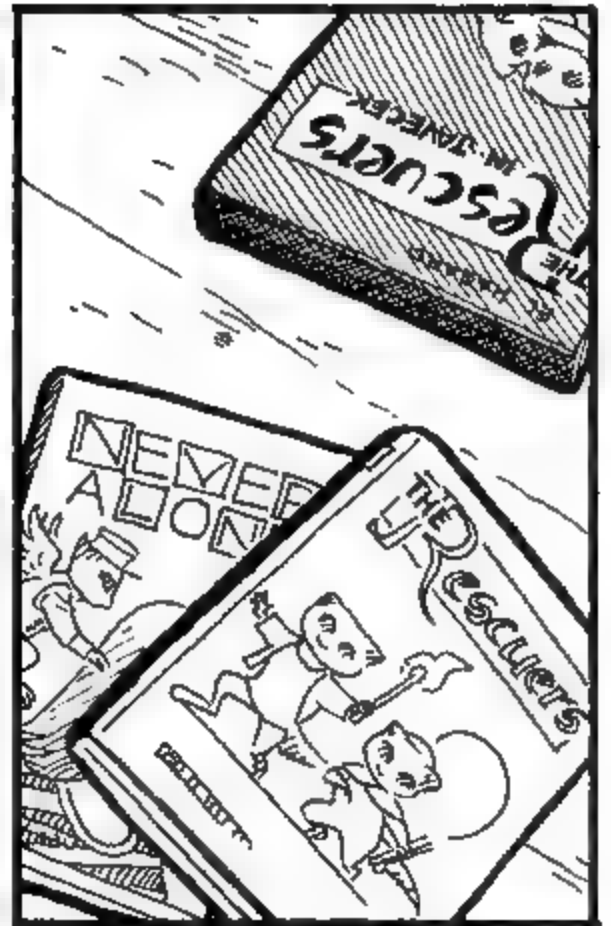
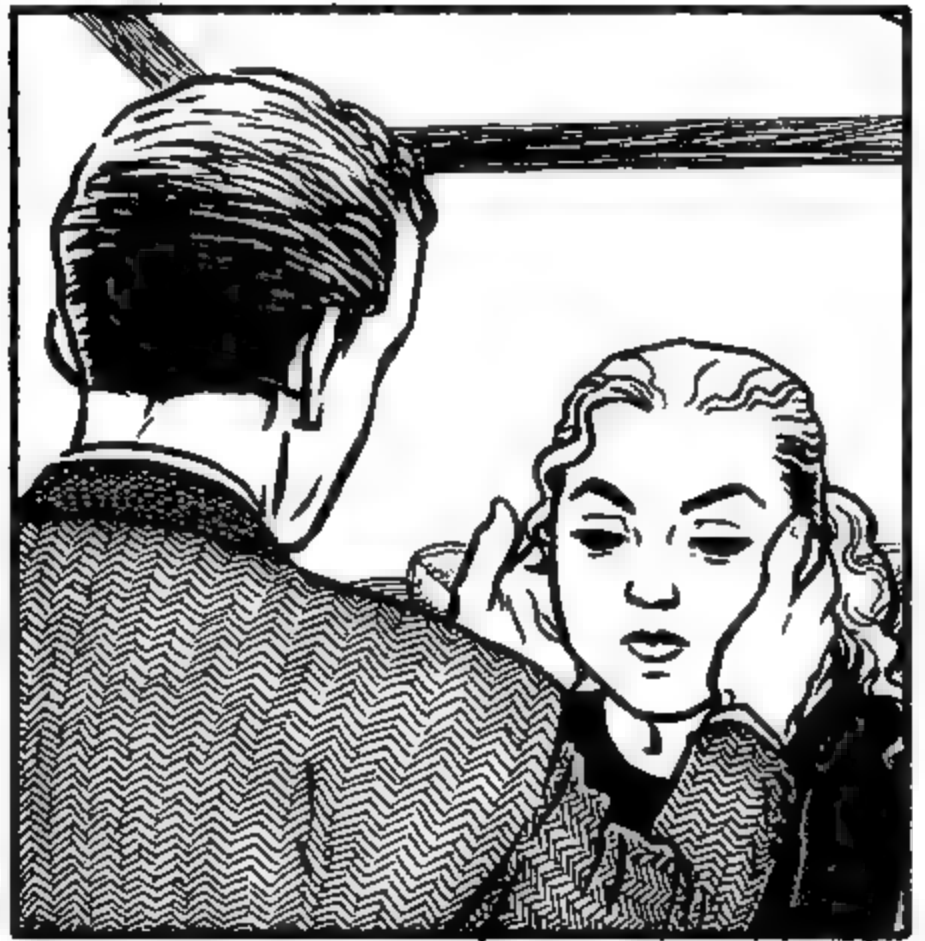








IT'S.. JUST FOR NOW. TIL I GET MY ENERGY BACK. IS THERE A CRIME IN WANTING SOME SENSE OF CONTROL?







HOW ON
EARTH DID YOU
GET UP HERE,
MISS?







Oracle

DRUM CHIEF,
I HAVE HAD A DARK
DREAM IN THESE
DARK DAYS...

IN MY DREAM
I SAW TWO CHILDREN
BORN, ONE ALIVE AND
ONE DEAD.

AND THE DEAD ONE
WOULD EAT ALIVE THE
LIVING ONE, AND THE
LIVING ONE WOULD BE
BORN AGAIN IN THE
CLEARING.

BUT THE DEAD
ONE WAS ENTANGLED
IN THE ROOTS OF
THE TREE...

JAHOUA.

IT'S VERY PRETTY, JAHOUA.
BUT IT ISN'T ART. IT'S EASY TO
SOUND OMNISCIANT WHEN EVERY-
ONE TELLS YOU ALL THEIR PROBLEMS.
IF THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON,
FOR GOD'S SAKE, LET'S HAVE IT!

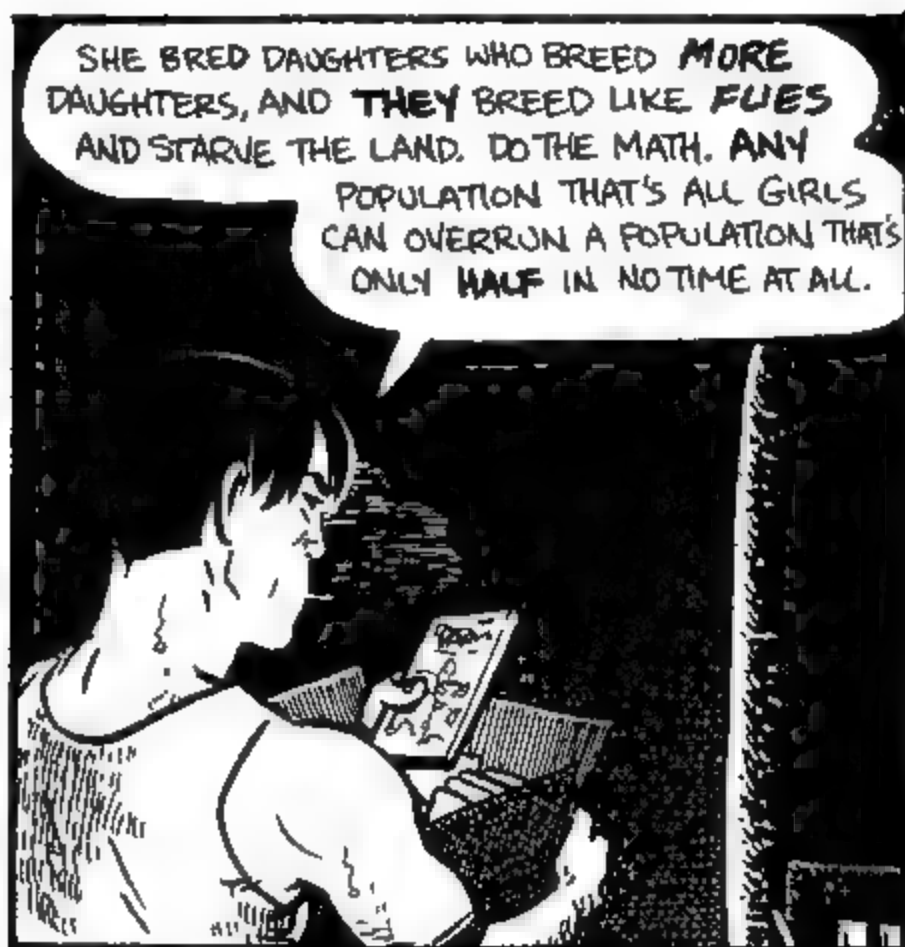
WIN AM
I ALWAYS
THE LAST TO
KNOW?

Slotsam

ONE OF THE
ASCIAN GUYS OUT
THERE, I WAS JUST
TAKING THEM SOME
LEFTOVER HORS D'OEUVRES,
AND HE WAS SAYING HIS
WIFE'S GOT ANOTHER
BABY COMING, THAT'S
HOW HE SAID IT,
A-**NOTH**-ER,
AND HE'S DRUNK
AND HE CALLED ME
LILITU AND HE
SPIT ON ME.







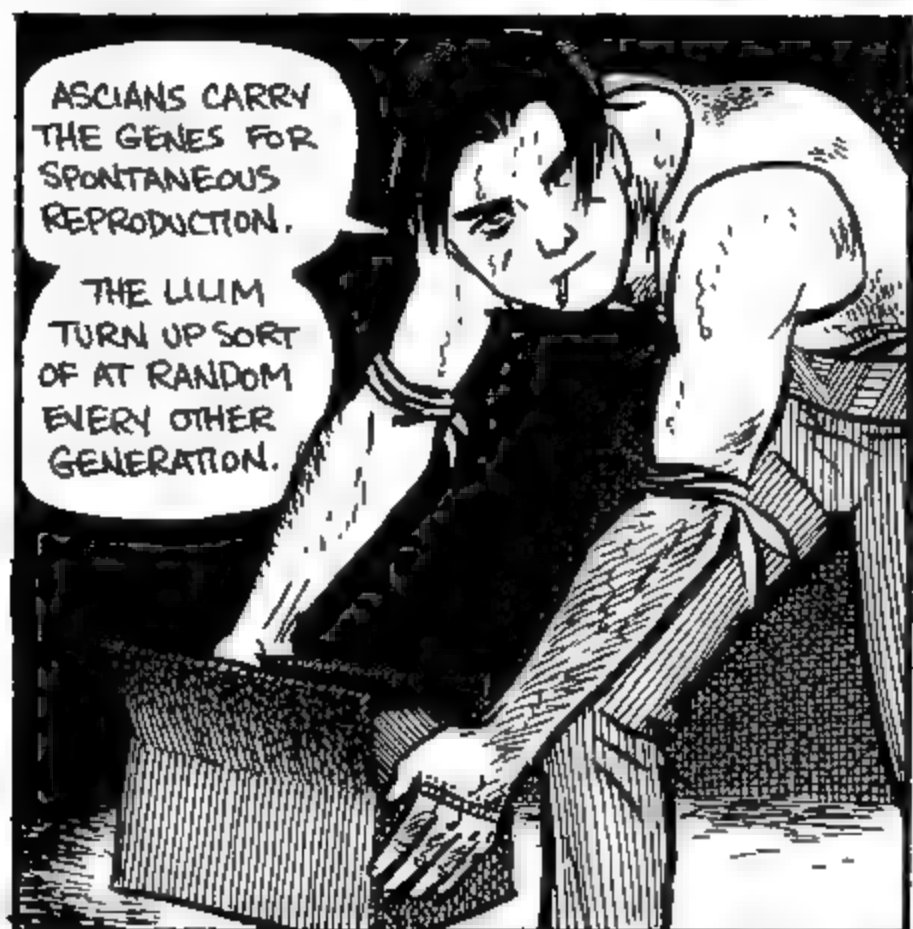
SHE BRED DAUGHTERS WHO BREED **MORE** DAUGHTERS, AND **THEY** BREED LIKE **FUES** AND STARVE THE LAND. DO THE MATH. ANY POPULATION THAT'S ALL GIRLS CAN OVERRUN A POPULATION THAT'S ONLY **HALF** IN NO TIME AT ALL.



THEY'RE NOT PRETTY, THEY'RE NOT **SANE**-- THEY'RE STARVING, CANNIBALISTIC HORRORS.

OH, FOR-- IT'S PROBABLY JUST SOME OLDER FERTILITY GODDESS YOU'RE ALL CRAPPING ON-- **YOU'RE** TALKING ABOUT LILITH AS IF SHE WAS **REAL**!

SHE IS.



ASCIANS CARRY THE GENES FOR SPONTANEOUS REPRODUCTION.

THE LILIM TURN UP SORT OF AT RANDOM EVERY OTHER GENERATION.

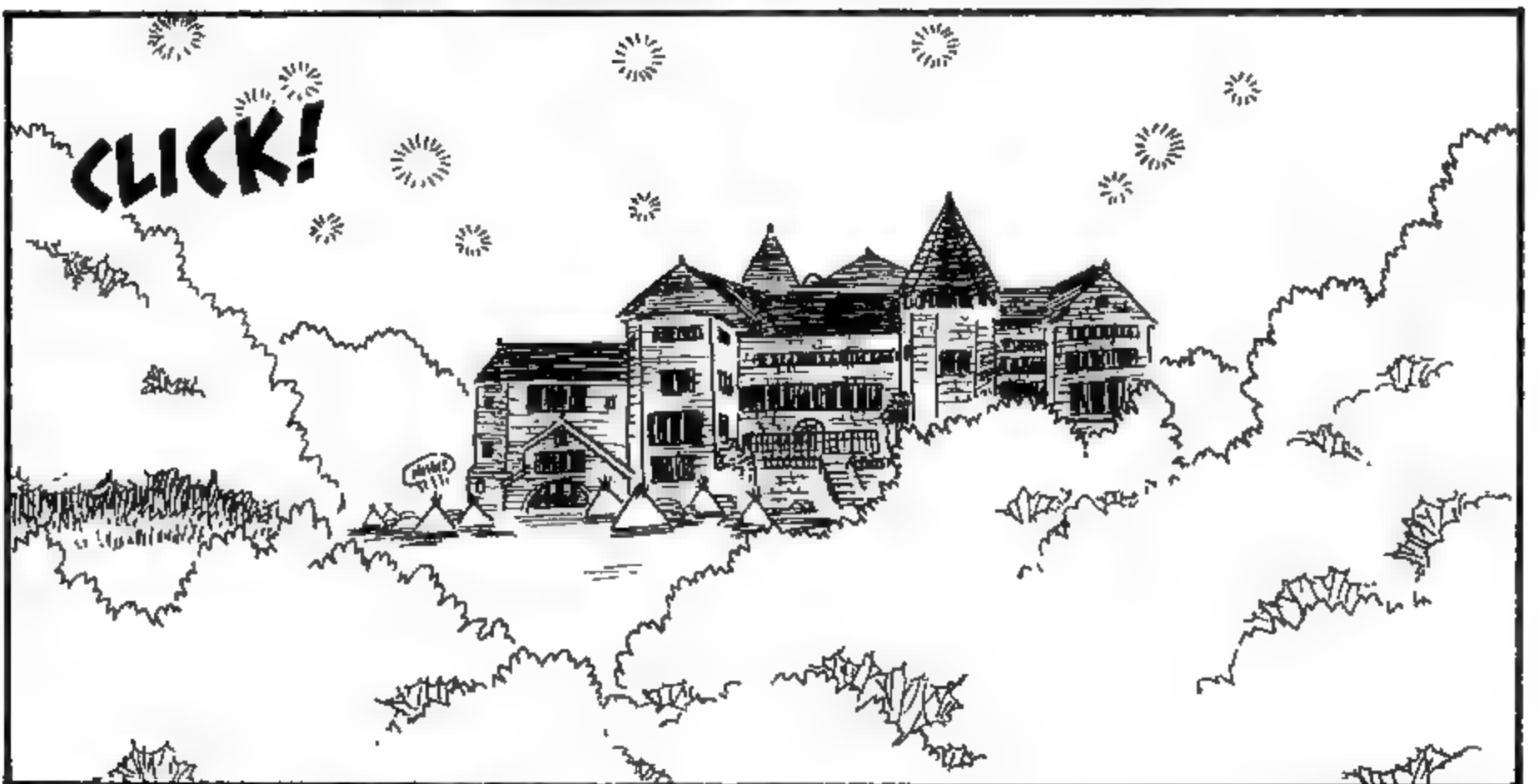


NORTH LIKES KILLING GIRLS, LYDIA.

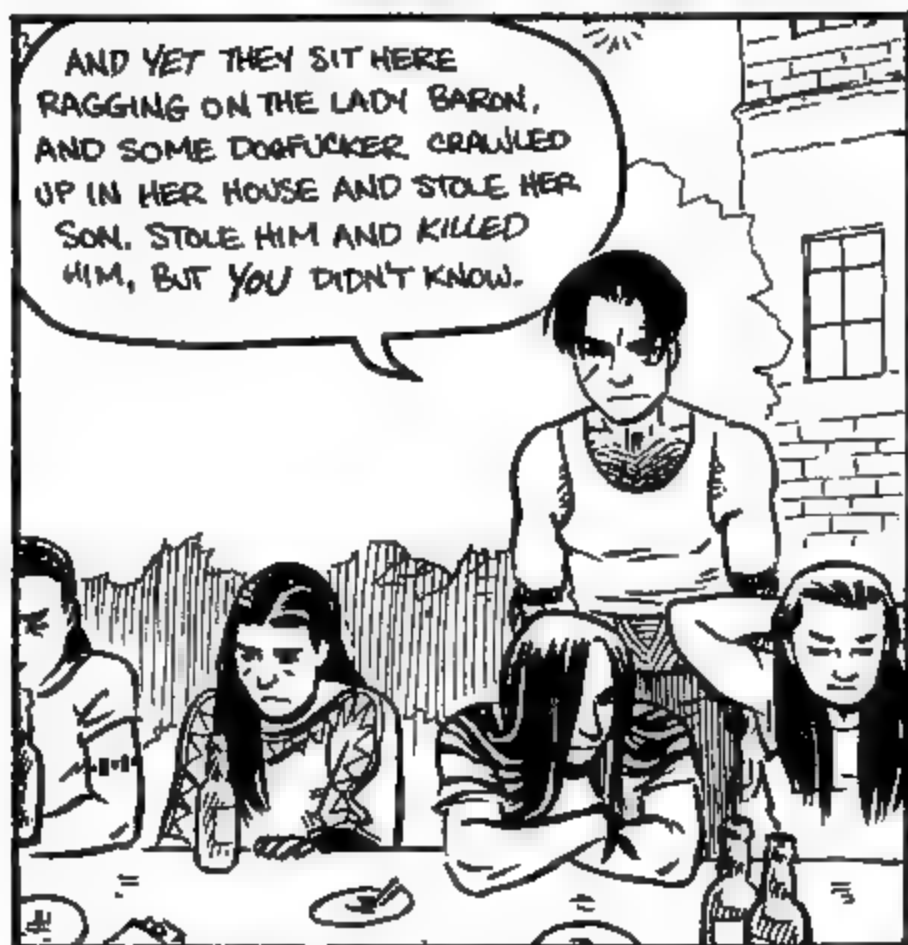


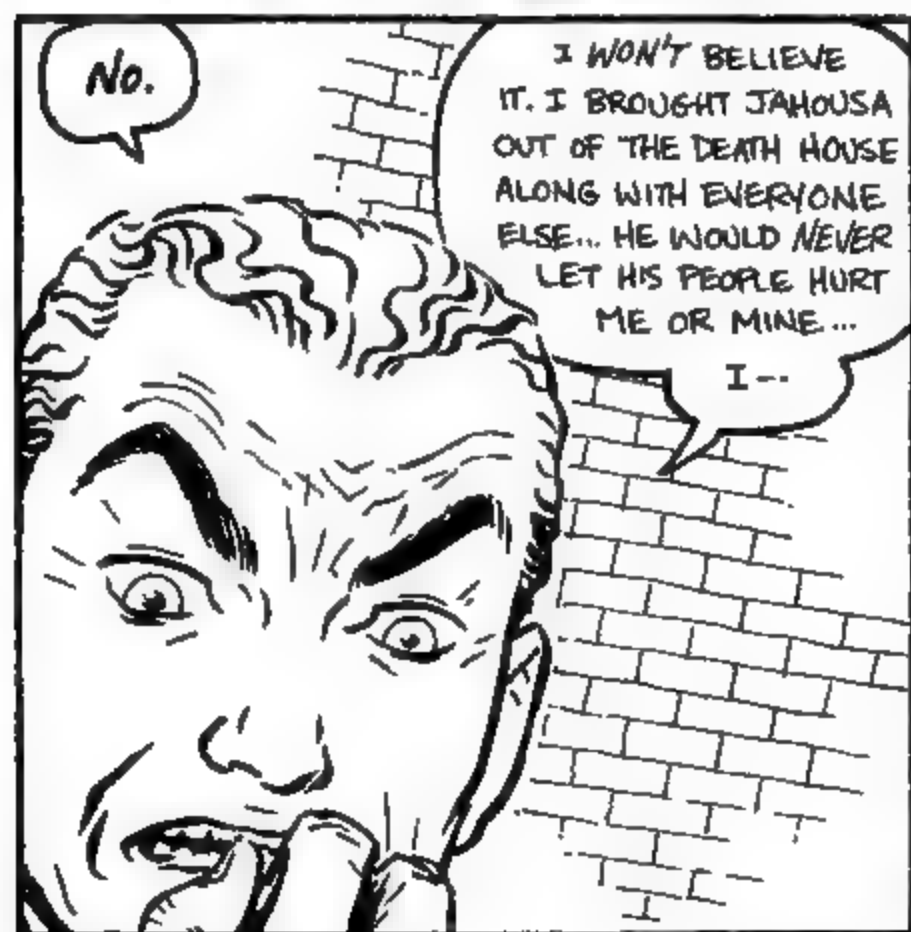
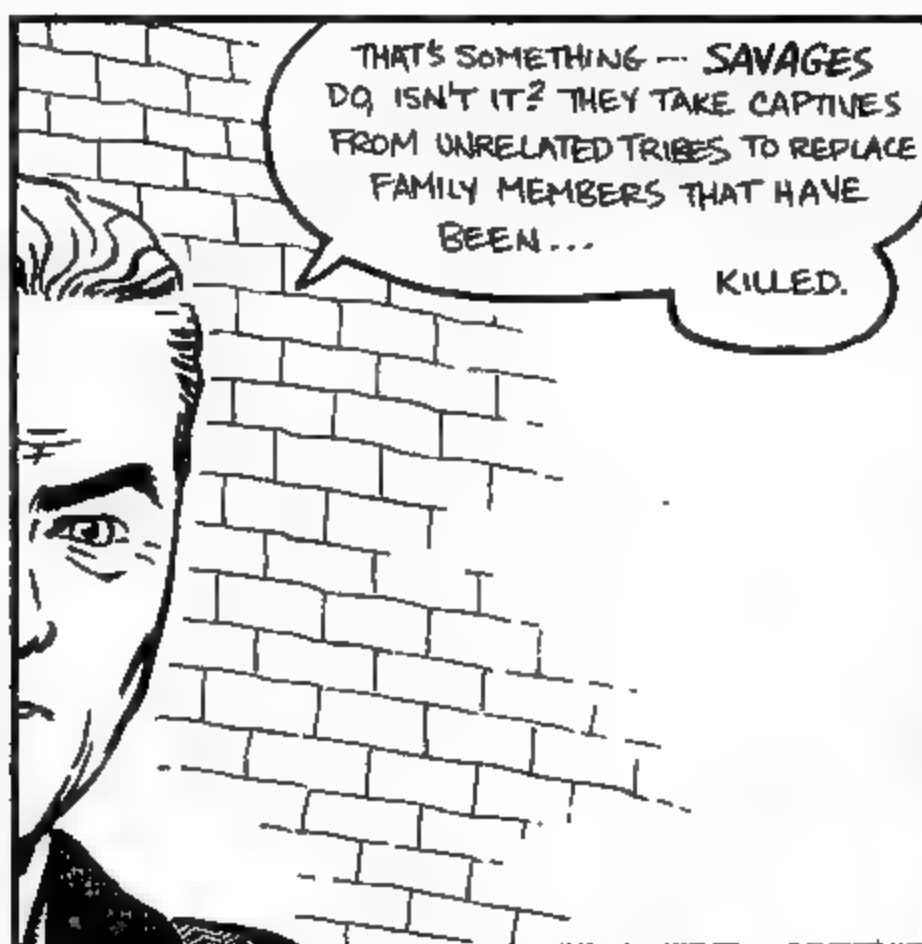
STILL GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR ASCIAN HALF DIRECT FROM THE SOURCE, LYDIA?

YES, HOW'S THAT WORKING OUT FOR YOU?





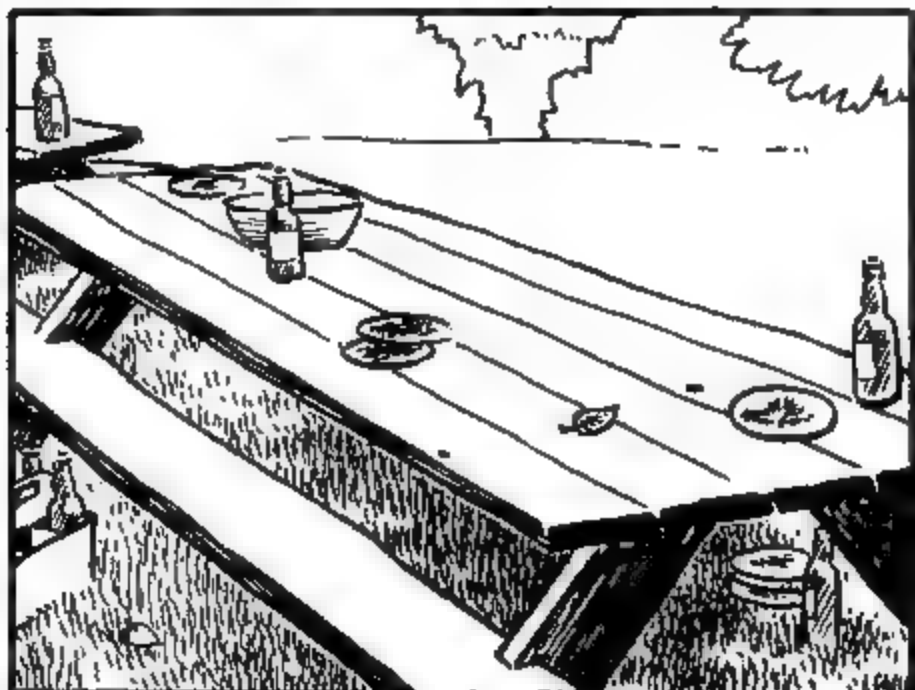




PLEASE.
I KNOW HOW
MY DEPARTMENT
WORKS. OR
DOESN'T.



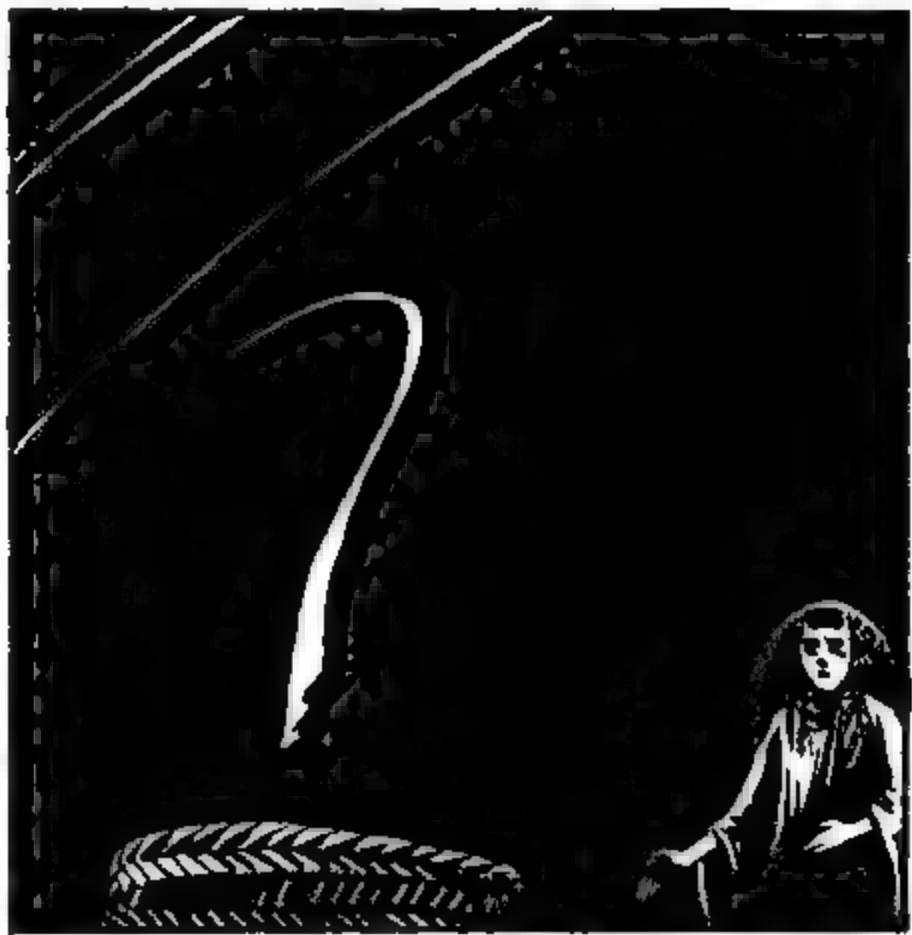
THEY'LL GO THROUGH
THE MOTIONS OF AN
INVESTIGATION A WHILE
LONGER, BUT THEY'RE
DONE. ESPECIALLY WITH
A SUSPECT IN
CUSTODY...

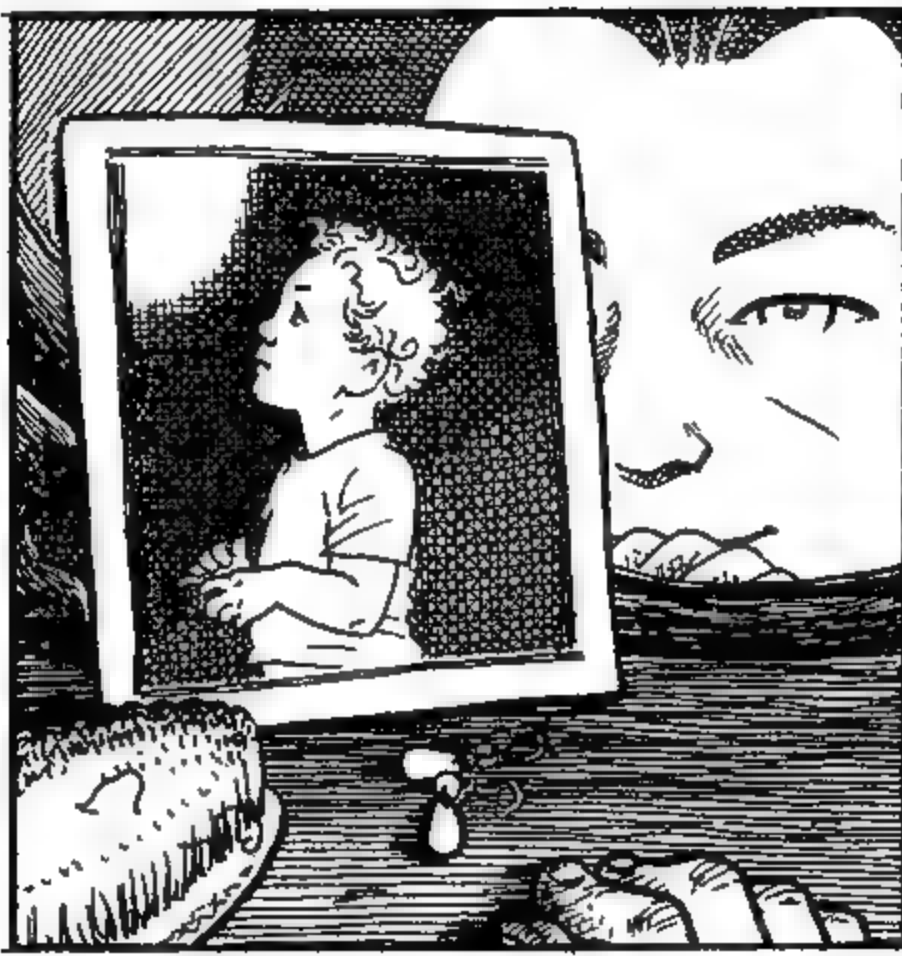


AND FRANKLY,
I'VE GOT NOTHING
MORE TO GIVE THEM.
NO MORE LEADS.
I'M ALL OUT OF
RABBITS.



YOU
FUCKING
WHAT?







AAAGH,
FUCK!

WHAT?

I MADE IT
EASY FOR YOU.
NOW ALL YOU HAVE
TO DO IS CHASE
ASCIANS.

WHO HAVE
NOWHERE TO
RUN TO ANY-
WAY.



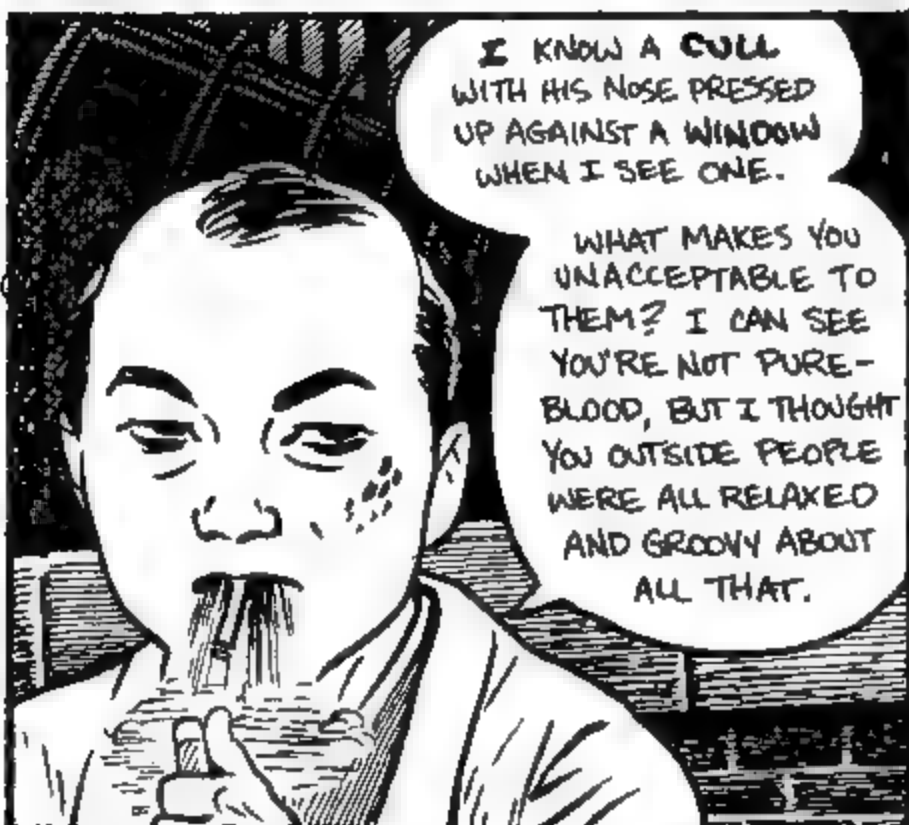
SON OF
A BITCH

YOU'RE A COOL
MOTHERFUCKER.
TURNED YOUR OWN
PEOPLE OUT FOR THE
POLICE. WE'LL CRUCIFY
THEM, YOU KNOW.



THEY AIN'T MY
PEOPLE. THESE
ARE FROM --

BULLSHIT.



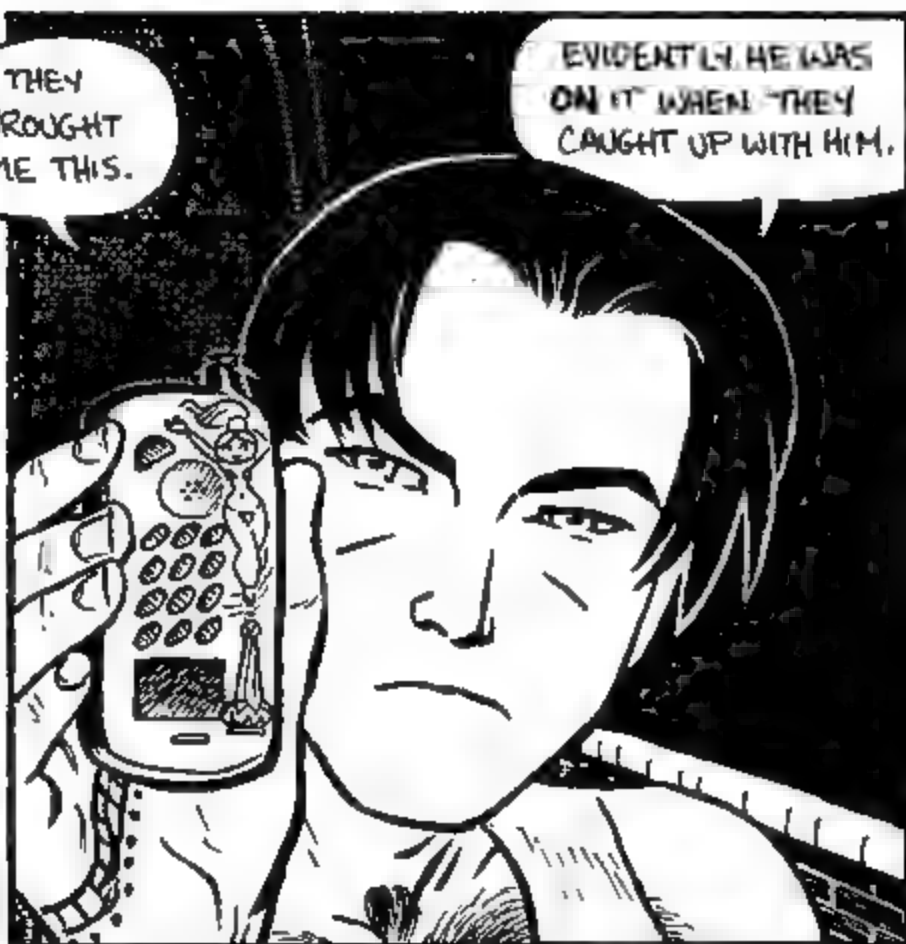
I KNOW A COOL
WITH HIS NOSE PRESSED
UP AGAINST A WINDOW
WHEN I SEE ONE.

WHAT MAKES YOU
UNACCEPTABLE TO
THEM? I CAN SEE
YOU'RE NOT PURE-
BLOOD, BUT I THOUGHT
YOU OUTSIDE PEOPLE
WERE ALL RELAXED
AND GROOVY ABOUT
ALL THAT.

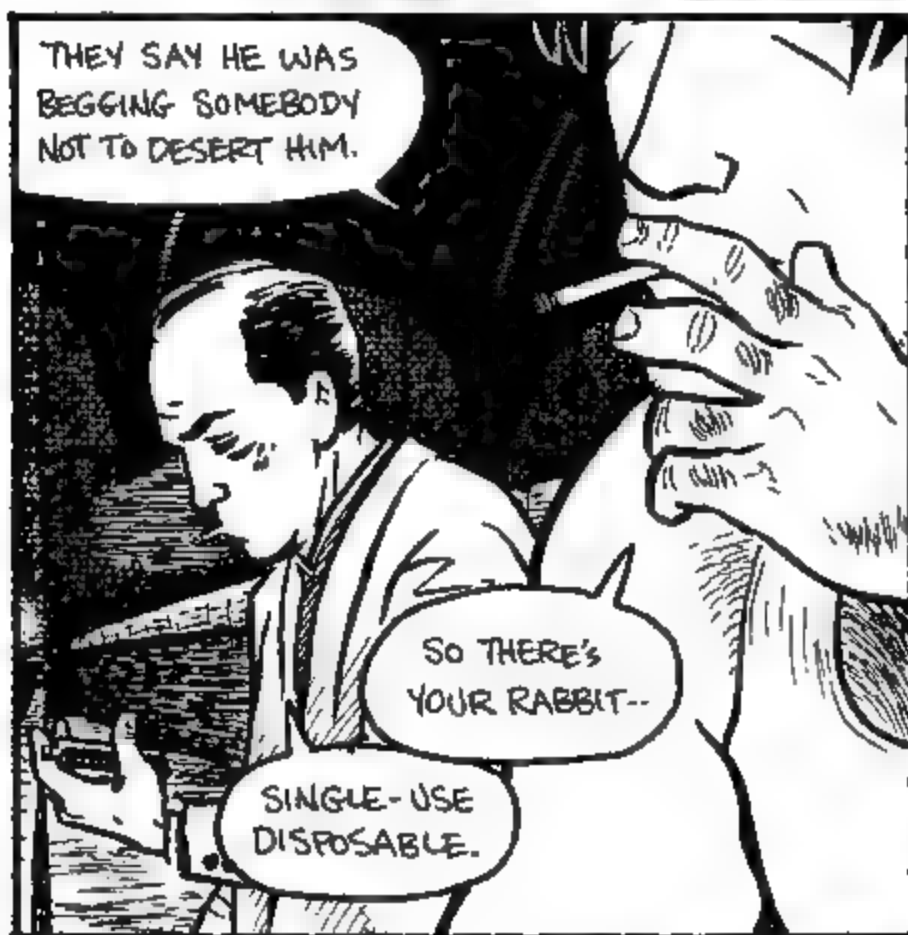




THEY
BROUGHT
ME THIS.



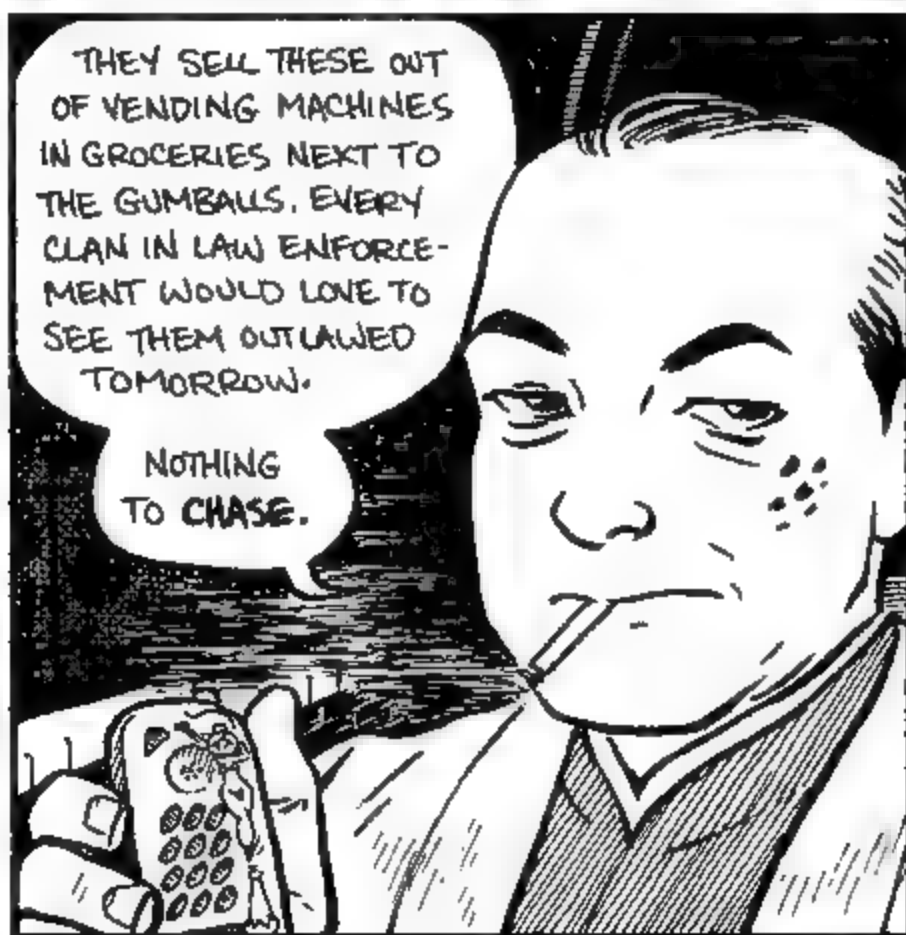
EVIDENTLY HE WAS
ON IT WHEN THEY
CAUGHT UP WITH HIM.



THEY SAY HE WAS
BEGGING SOMEBODY
NOT TO DESERT HIM.

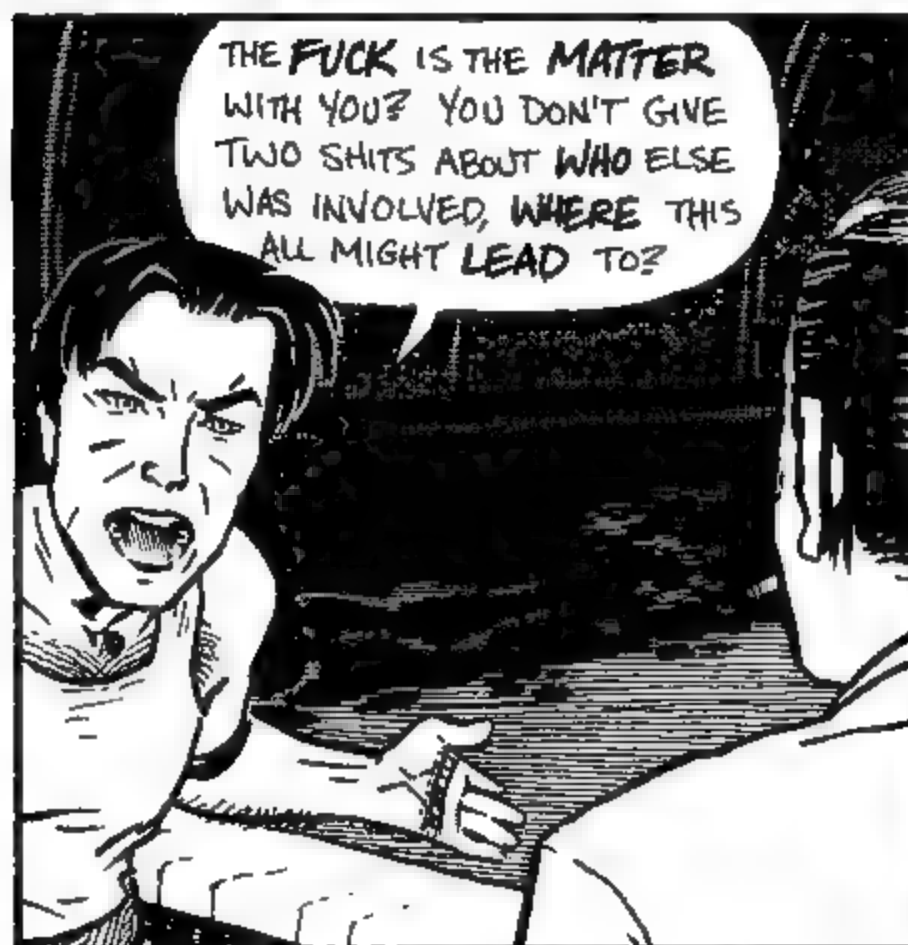
SO THERE'S
YOUR RABBIT--

SINGLE-USE
DISPOSABLE.



THEY SELL THESE OUT
OF VENDING MACHINES
IN GROCERIES NEXT TO
THE GUMBALLS. EVERY
CLAN IN LAW ENFORCE-
MENT WOULD LOVE TO
SEE THEM OUTLAWED
TOMORROW.

NOTHING
TO CHASE.

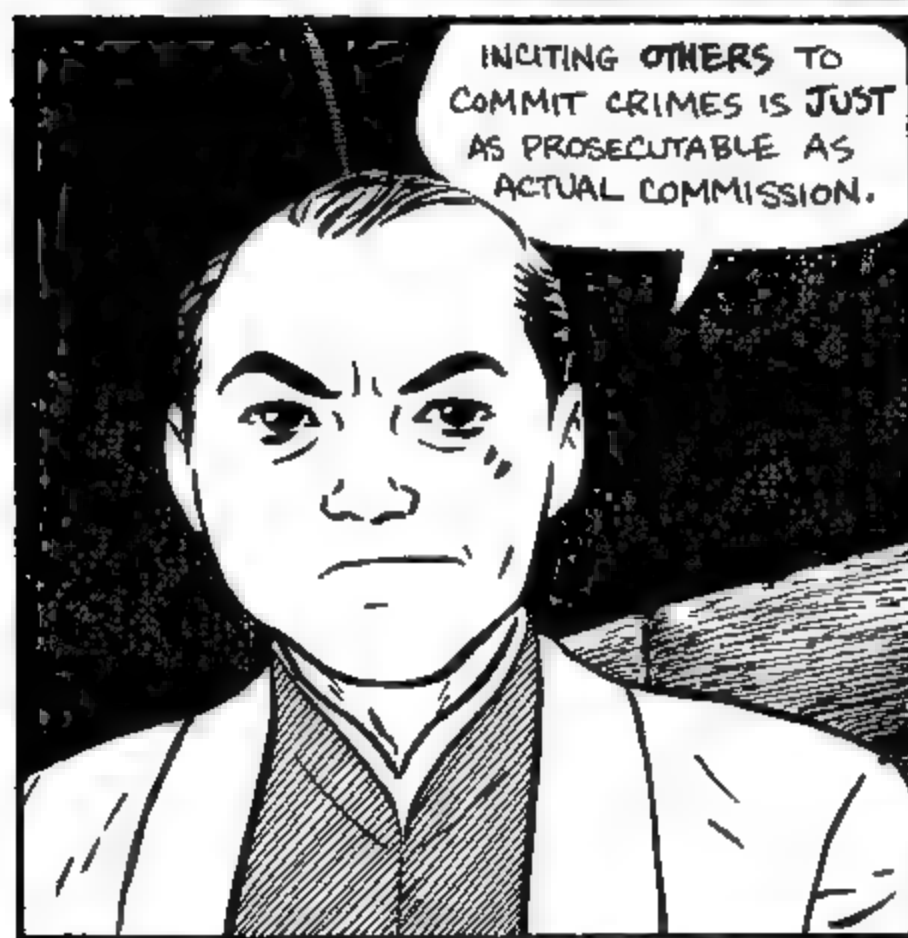
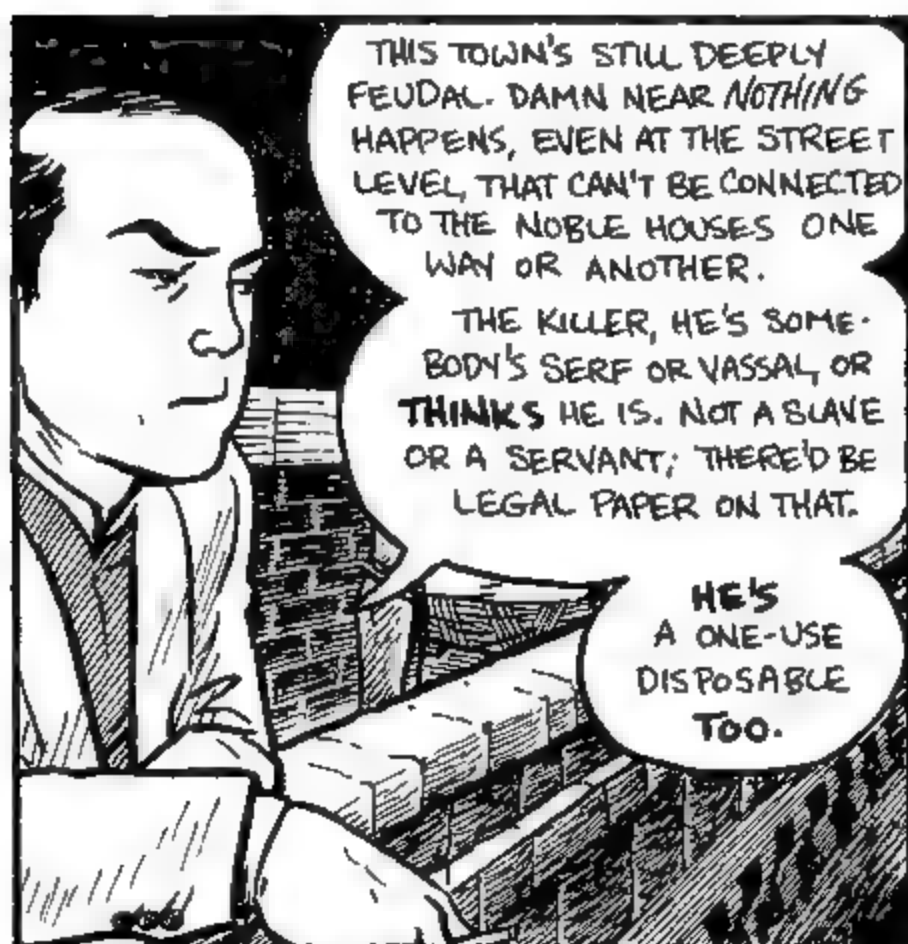


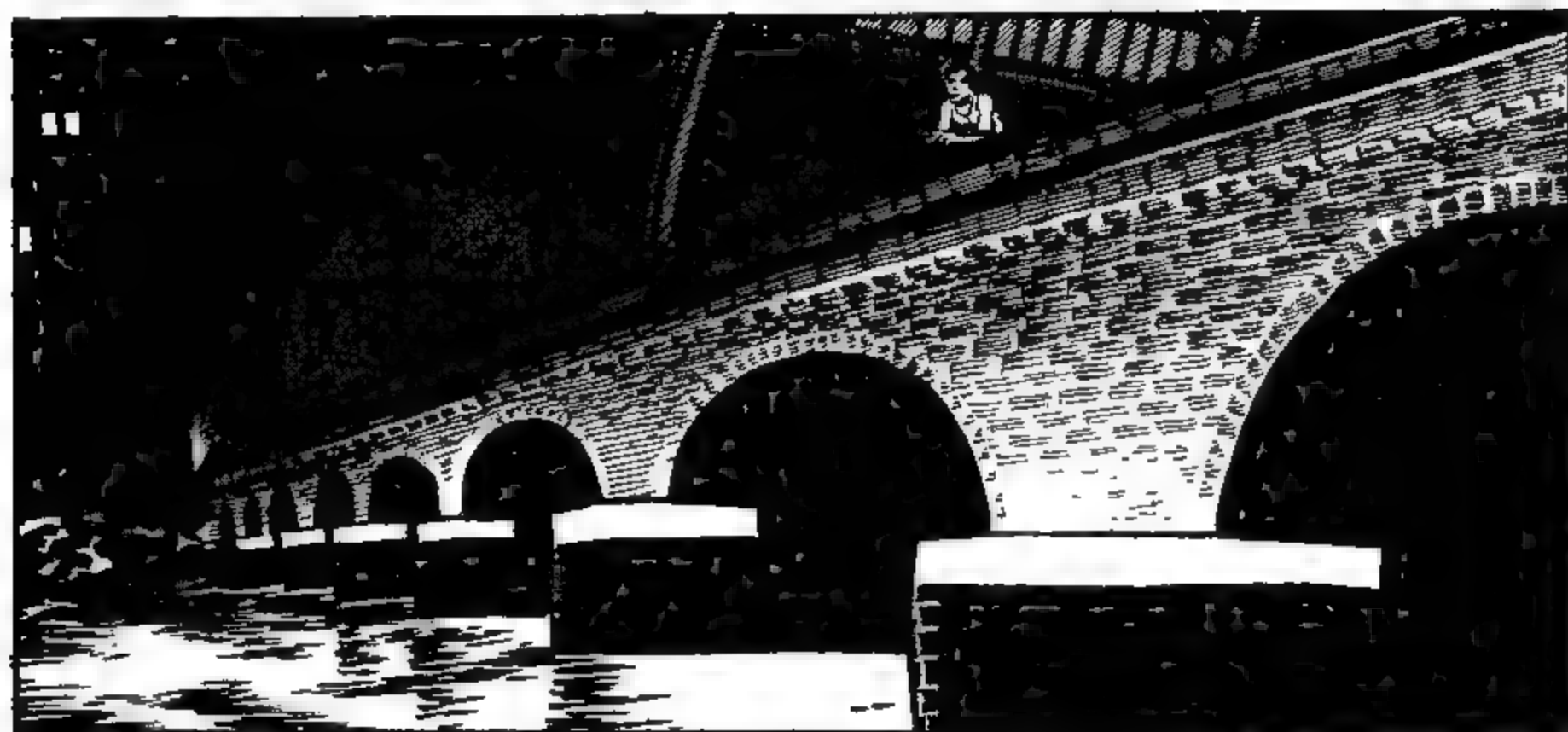
THE **FUCK** IS THE **MATTER**
WITH YOU? YOU DON'T GIVE
TWO SHITS ABOUT **WHO ELSE**
WAS INVOLVED, **WHERE THIS**
ALL MIGHT LEAD TO?

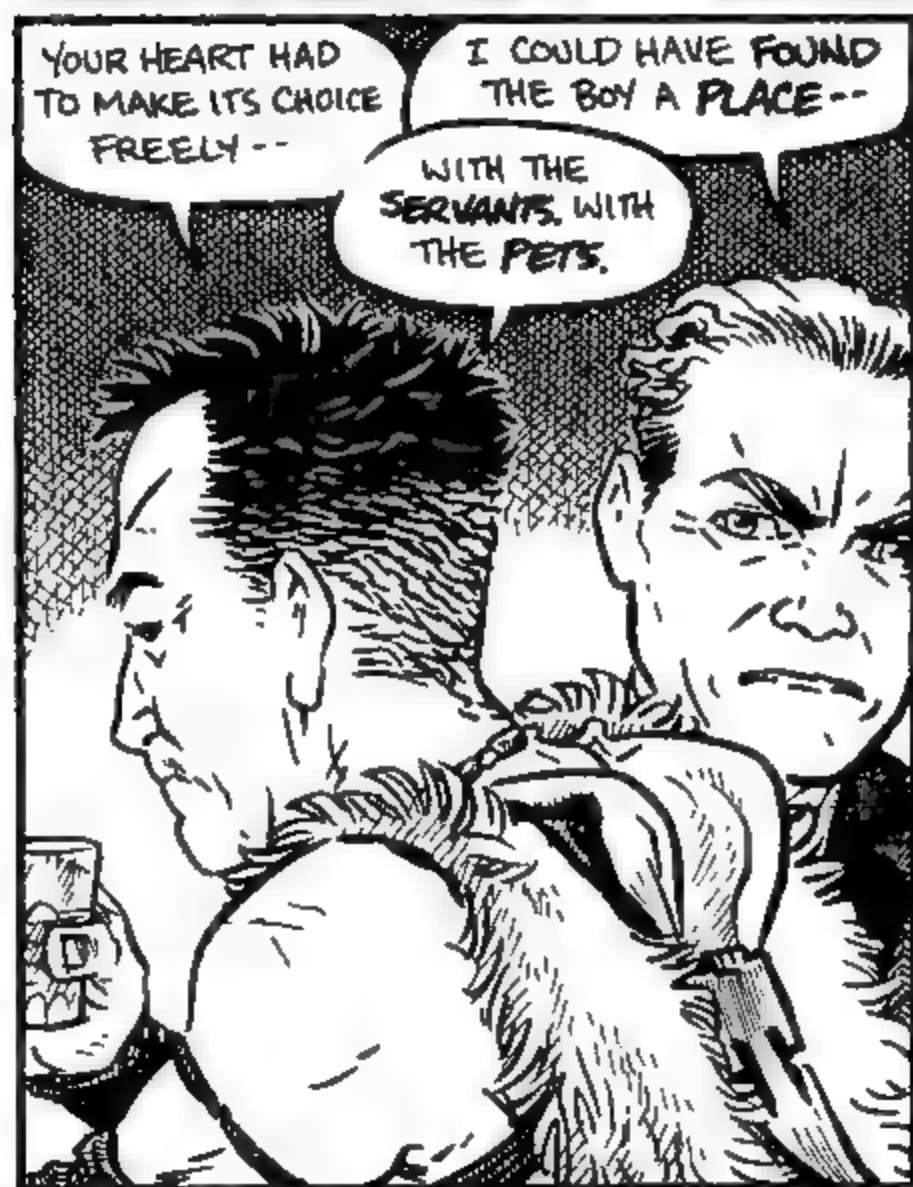


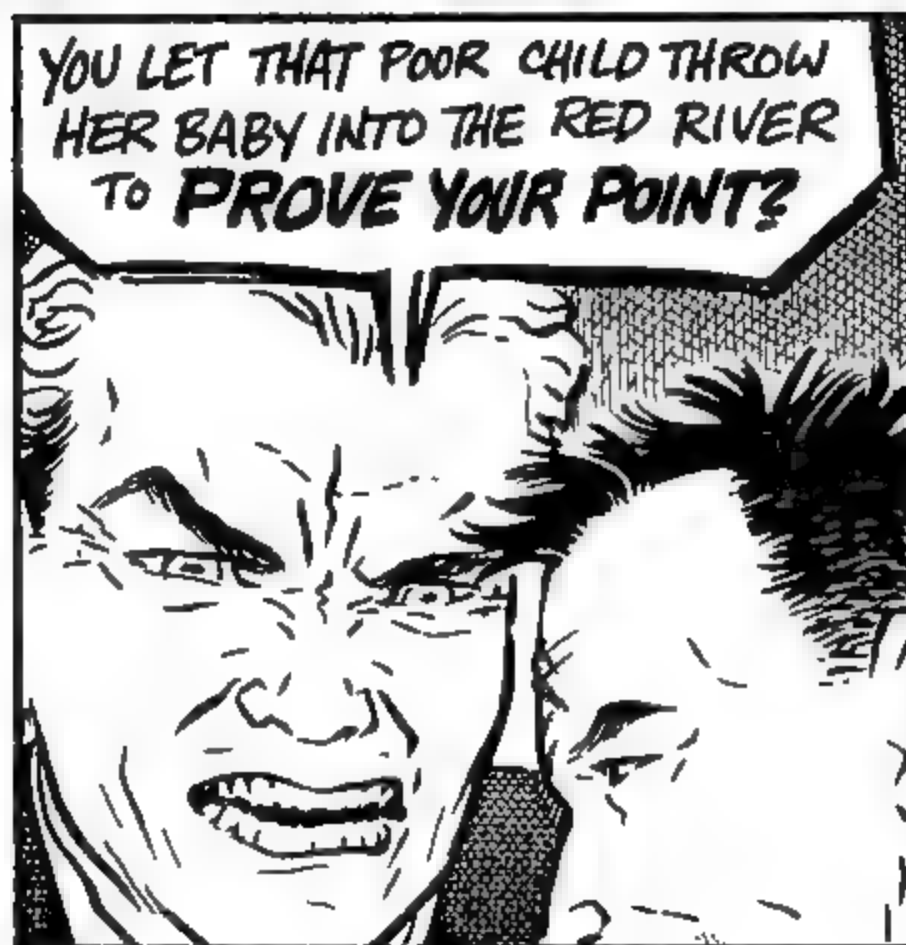
YOU REALLY ARE BLESSED
WITH **TOTAL** IGNORANCE
ABOUT THE WAY THIS CITY
RUNS, AREN'T YOU?

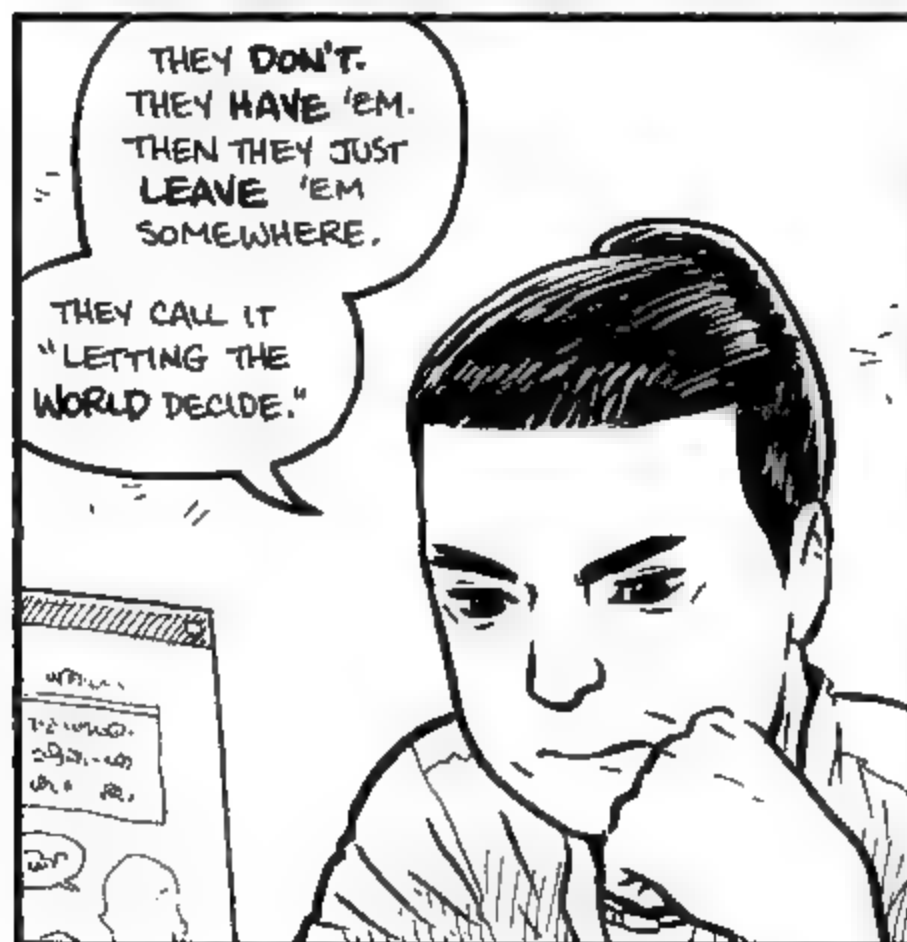
IT LEADS
TO THE
FAMILIES.

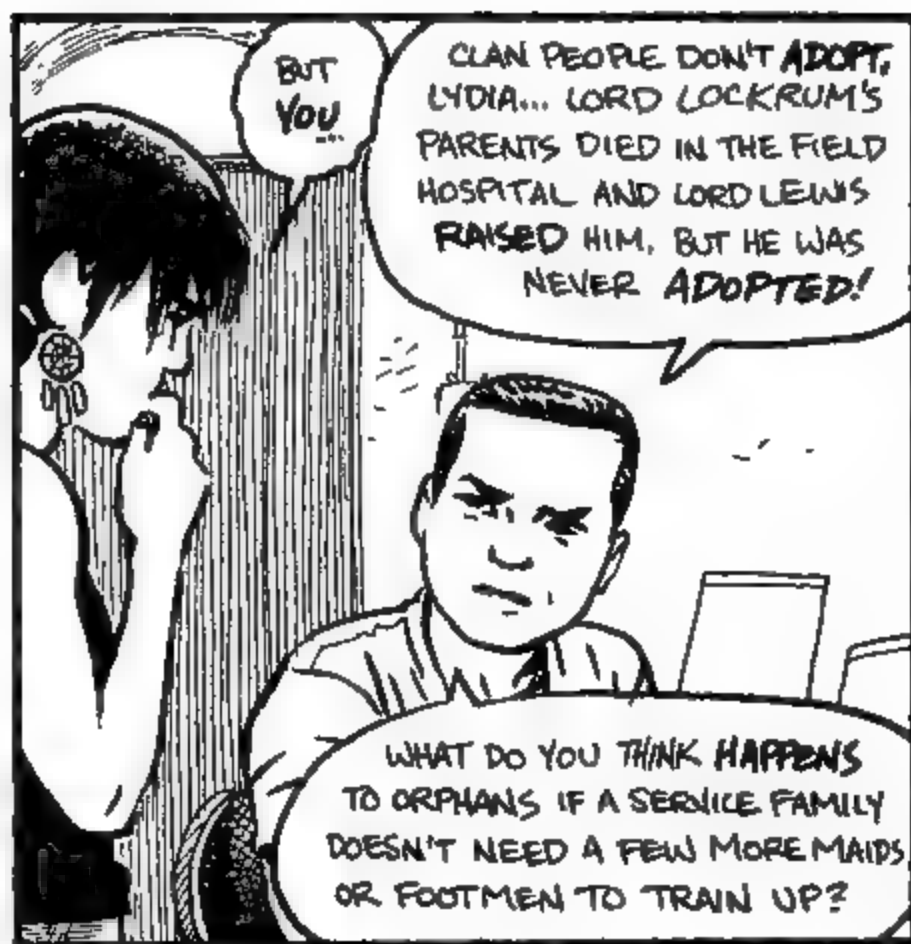
















OF COURSE LADY
ETHANY'S ASCIAN-
INSPIRED LINE IS
GORGEOUS—

BUT WHO KNEW
THOSE SAVAGES
WERE SO
VIOLENT?

BT GARSE,
IF YOU ASK
ME...



YOU KNOW LADY ETHANY
HAD ALL HER BABY'S THINGS
BURN'T AFTER SHE GOT THE
NEWS.

No!

OH YES.
SHE DIDN'T KEEP
ANY MEMORANDS.

WELL,
SHE'S ALWAYS
BEEN A TRIPLE
HIGH STRING.

OH! YOU
DON'T THINK--

YES,
BUT--



I MEAN, HEY,
EASY KILLER, EVEN
GUYS WHO DON'T BELIEVE
IN HEAVEN STILL BELIEVE
IN INSURANCE.

ROBERT
GIPSON? C'MON.



WOW. NOW
THAT IS A
WELL-MADE
BASKET.

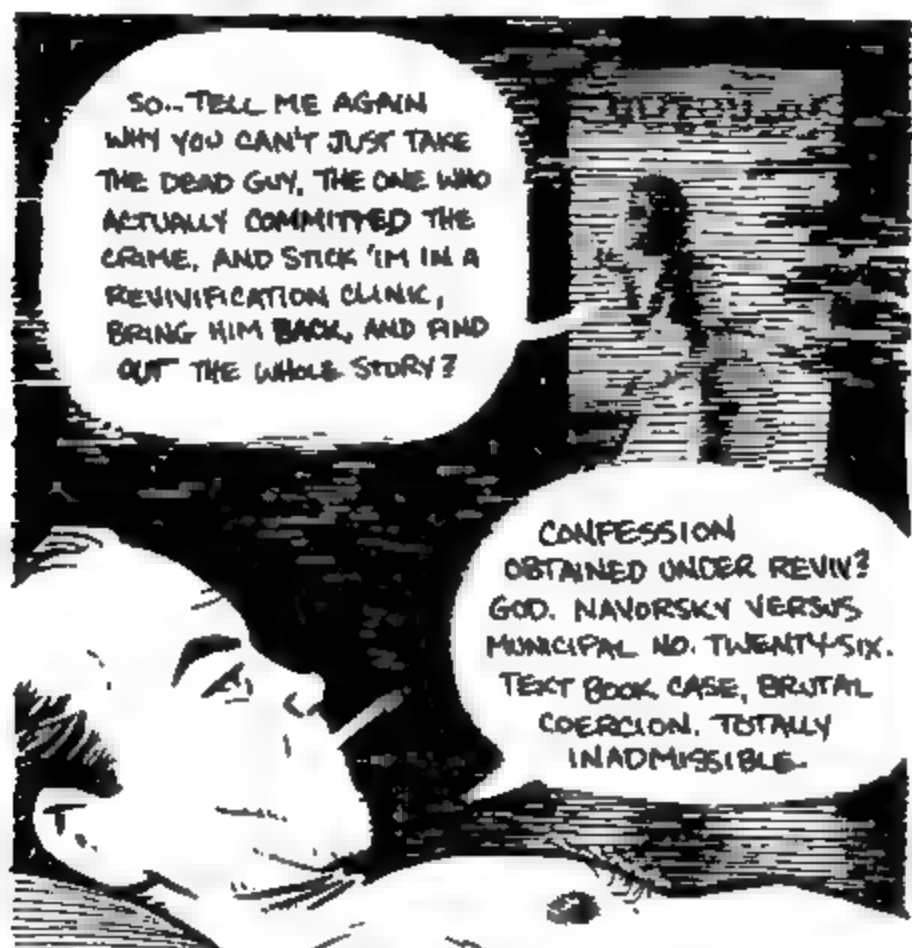


INDIA, YOU ARE
A FUCKING MORON.
YOU CAN'T PICK AND
CHOOSE PARTS OF A
CULTURE TO TACK ON
TO YOUR LIFE AND YOU
CAN'T LEARN A WAY
OF LIFE FROM TV!

STICK TO WHO
YOU KNOW, GIRL!



I "LET" HIM
TALK TO YOU LIKE
THAT, LITTLE GIRL,
BECAUSE YOU WON'T
HEAR IT COMING
FROM ANYONE
ELSE. LEAST
OF ALL, A
WOMAN.



SO...TELL ME AGAIN
WHY YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE
THE DEAD GUY, THE ONE WHO
ACTUALLY COMMITTED THE
CRIME, AND STICK 'IM IN A
REVIVIFICATION CLINIC,
BRING HIM BACK, AND FIND
OUT THE WHOLE STORY?

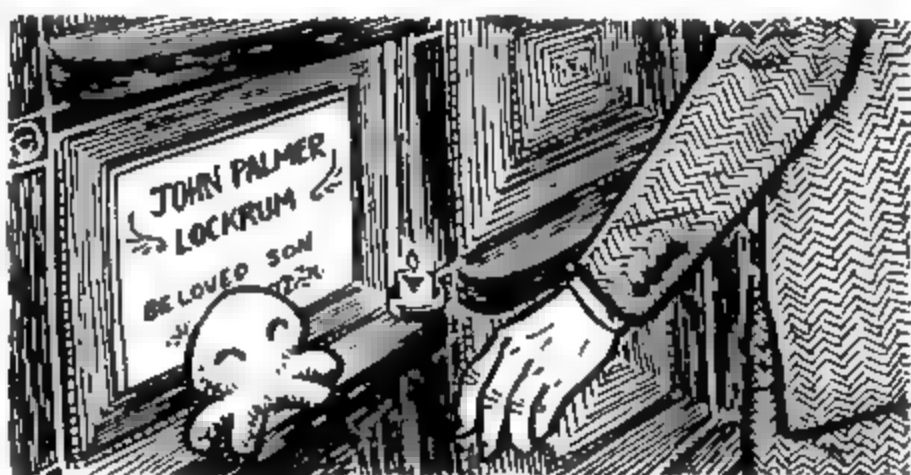
CONFESSION
OBTAINED UNDER REVIV?
GOD. NAVORSKY VERSUS
MUNICIPAL NO. TWENTY-SIX.
TEXT BOOK CASE, BRUTAL
COERCION. TOTALLY
INADMISSIBLE.



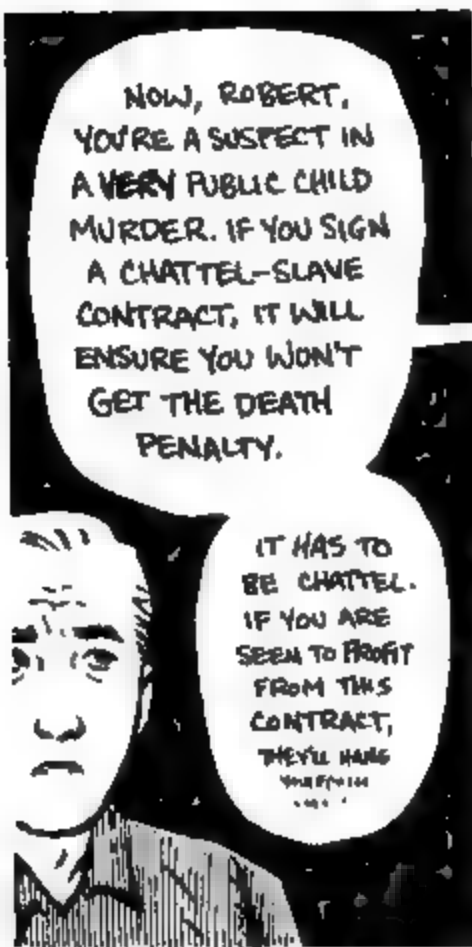
WHICH IS
NOT SAYING
YOU WON'T
DO IT.

PAYS TO KNOW,
DOESN'T IT?

PAYS WELL
TO BE THE ONLY
ONE WHO KNOWS.



JOHN PALMER
LOCKRUM
BELOVED SON
1924-1974



NOW, ROBERT, YOU'RE A SUSPECT IN A VERY PUBLIC CHILD MURDER. IF YOU SIGN A CHATTEL-SLAVE CONTRACT, IT WILL ENSURE YOU WON'T GET THE DEATH PENALTY.

IT HAS TO BE CHATTEL. IF YOU ARE SEEN TO PROFIT FROM THIS CONTRACT, THEY'LL HANG YOU FROM THE GUY.



LYDIA'S A GOOD KID. YOU'RE DOING A GOOD JOB WITH HER.

OH, DRY UP.



IN WHICH I PLACE MY TRUST;
IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS...

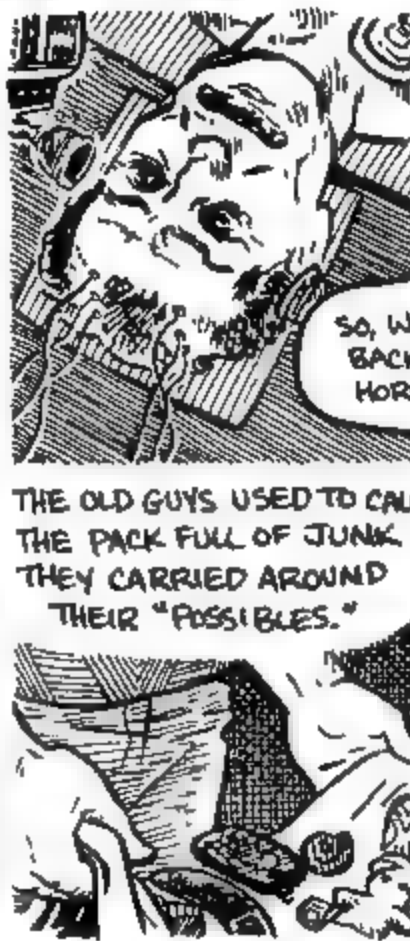


MY MOTHER USED TO TELL ME I'D FIND MY FAITH WHEN I HAD A BABY.

AND?

I DON'T CARE. EVERYBODY PICKS AND CHOOSES.

IF I BELIEVE IT IT IS TRUE.



SO, WELCOME BACK, MR. HORSLEY.

THE OLD GUYS USED TO CALL THE PACK FULL OF JUNK THEY CARRIED AROUND THEIR "POSSIBLES."



...THE REMISSION OF SIN...

YOU'RE A FAILED HERDSMAN, JANI.

I DON'T SEE WHY.



STRAY DOG SAVES NEWBORN

OH, HOW COOL. TARZAN OF THE MUTTS.

REMAINS OF ABANDONED INFANTS FOUND IN LAIR

URRGH! WHY DO THEY HAVE THAT ON AT DINNER-TIME?? SHEEZ!

I'M GONNA GET A TATTOO THAT REPRESENTS THAT.

SOMETHING TRIBAL.



NESSA, YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.

THAT'S WHY I BLAME MYSELF.

SOMEBODY HAS TO BE BLAMED... POOR GUY...

WHAT SHALL WE TALK ABOUT?

SHE DID IT!



IT'S FUNNY...

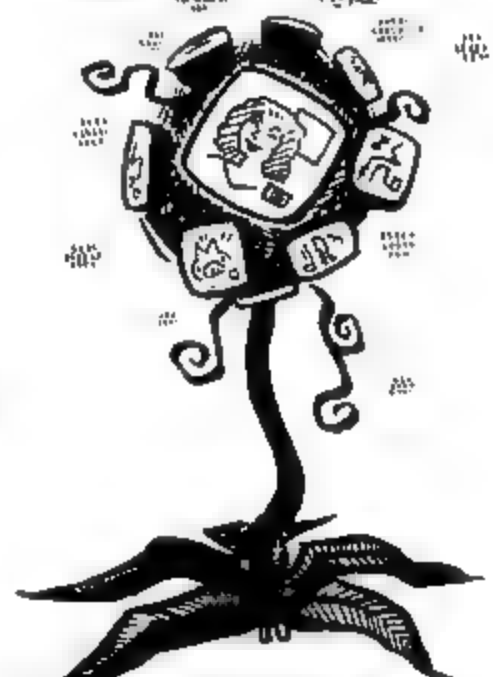
IT'S THE STUFF YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THAT DRIVES YOU CRAZY...

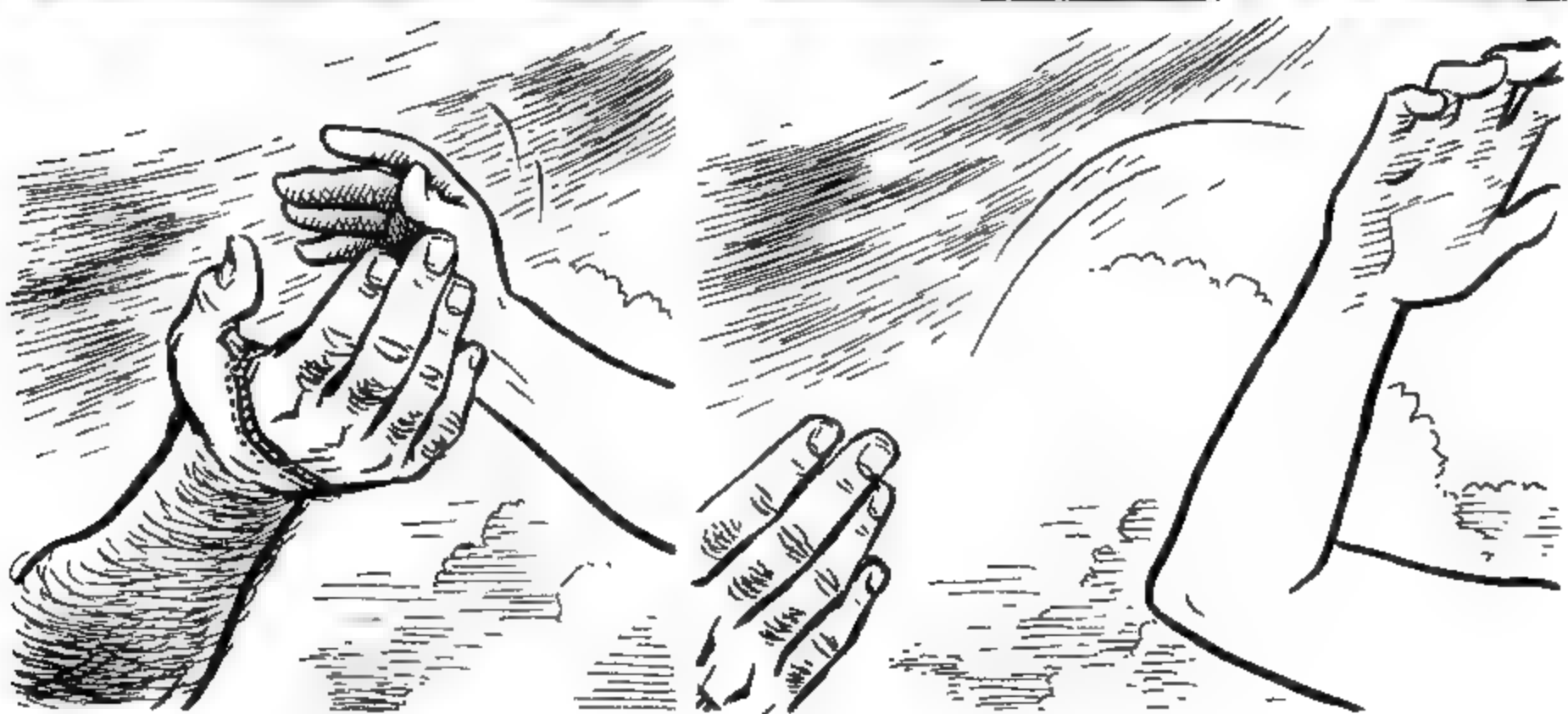
WHAT, LIKE HOW THAT GUY HAD TWO BABIES AND HAD TO GET RID OF ONE?

WHAT?

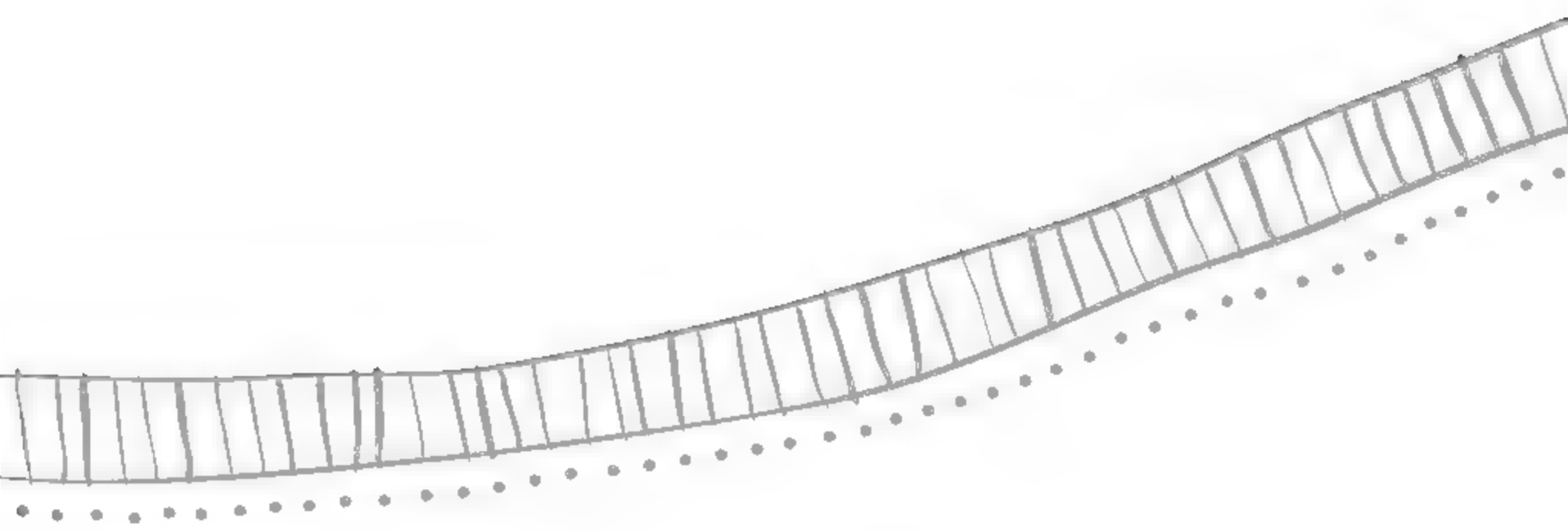
WAIT, WAIT, WAIT... NEW DID AT APPEN?

AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME AMEN.









"No matter
how **HOT**
you are,

No matter
how **RICH**,
how **SMART**,
how **COOL**
you are,

"somebody,

"somewhere,

"is **SICK**
of your
SHIT."

FIVE CRAZY WOMEN



DEDICATION

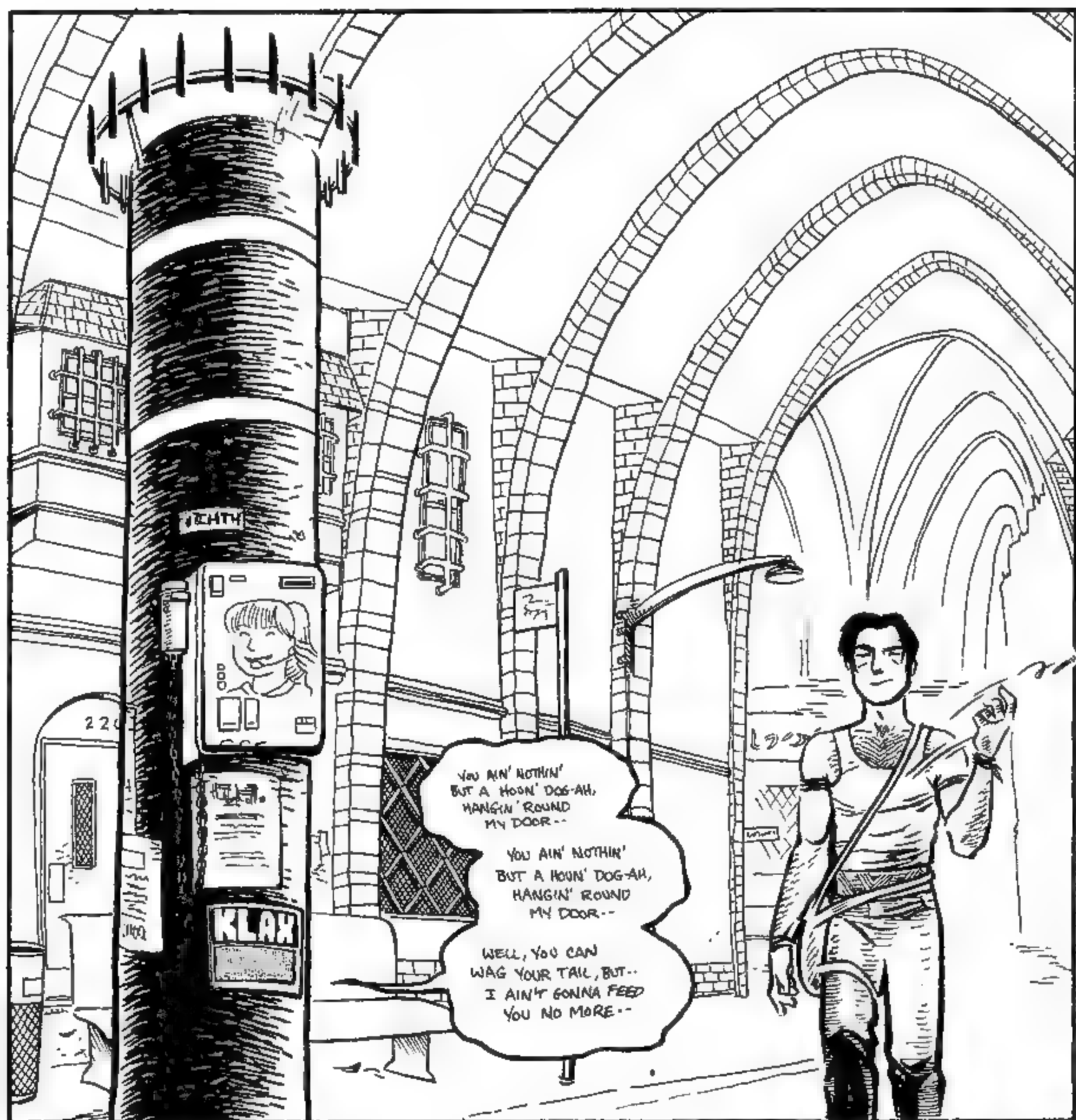


HE KNOWS WHO
HE KNOWS WHY

CHAPTER ONE :

BEWARE OF DOG

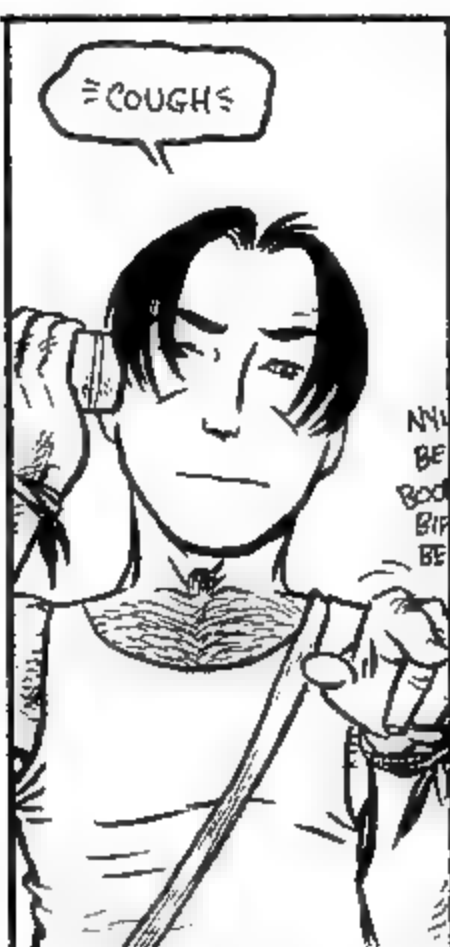






≡AH≡ OOKA OOKA
OOOGH OOOGHA OOGH
AH-AH-AH AAAAH!

≡BEEP≡

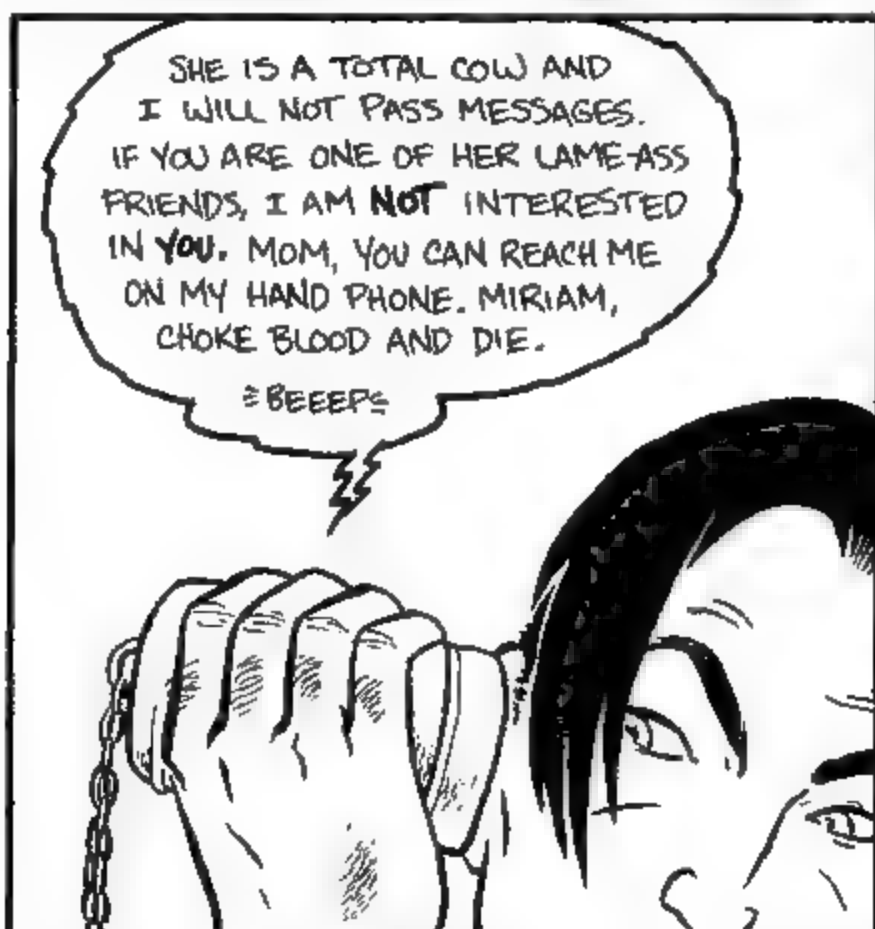


≡COUGH≡

NY
BE
BOO
BIF
BE

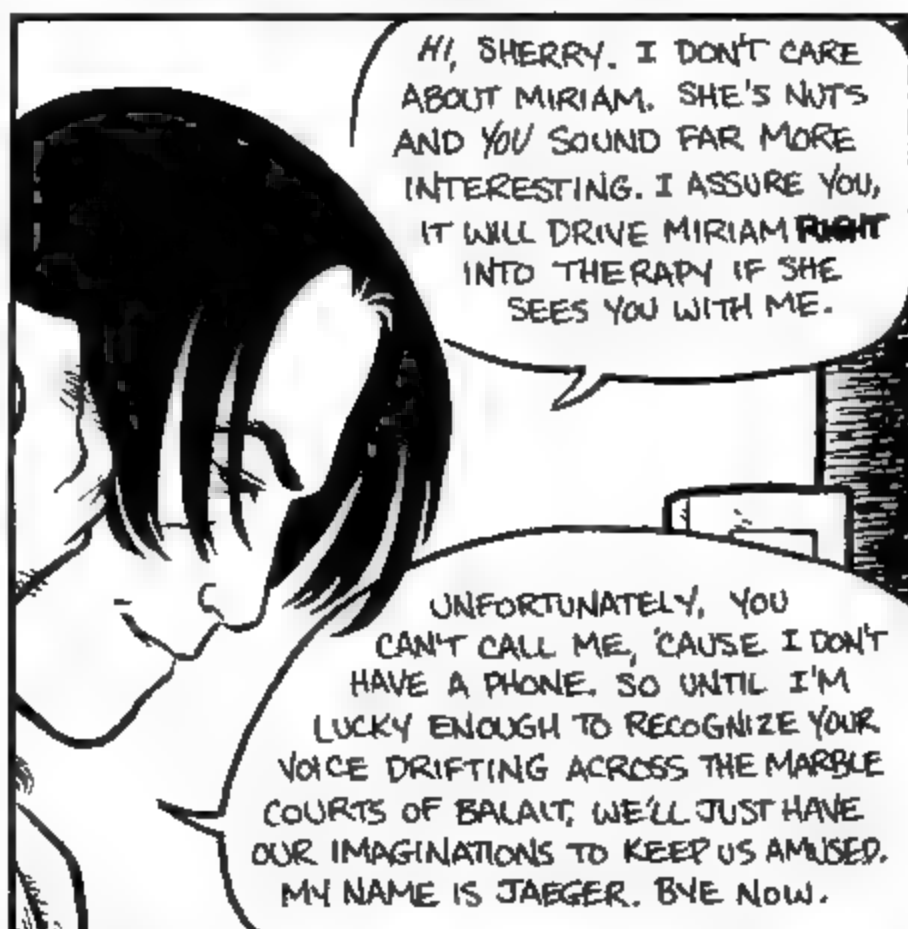


HI. THIS IS
SHERRY. THIS IS
NOT-- I REPEAT--
NOT MIRIAM. SHE
DOES **NOT** LIVE
HERE. I GOT HER
NUMBER BY
ACCIDENT.



SHE IS A TOTAL COW AND
I WILL NOT PASS MESSAGES.
IF YOU ARE ONE OF HER LAME-ASS
FRIENDS, I AM **NOT** INTERESTED
IN YOU. MOM, YOU CAN REACH ME
ON MY HAND PHONE. MIRIAM,
CHOKE BLOOD AND DIE.

≡BEEPS≡

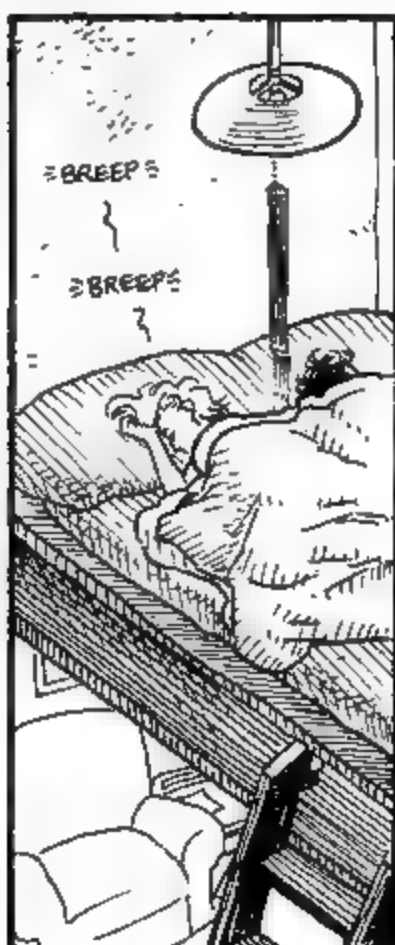


HI, SHERRY. I DON'T CARE
ABOUT MIRIAM. SHE'S NUTS
AND YOU SOUND FAR MORE
INTERESTING. I ASSURE YOU,
IT WILL DRIVE MIRIAM **RIGHT**
INTO THERAPY IF SHE
SEES YOU WITH ME.

UNFORTUNATELY, YOU
CAN'T CALL ME, 'CAUSE I DON'T
HAVE A PHONE. SO UNTIL I'M
LUCKY ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE YOUR
VOICE DRIFTING ACROSS THE MARBLE
COURTS OF BALAIT, WE'LL JUST HAVE
OUR IMAGINATIONS TO KEEP US AMUSED.
MY NAME IS JAEGER. BYE NOW.

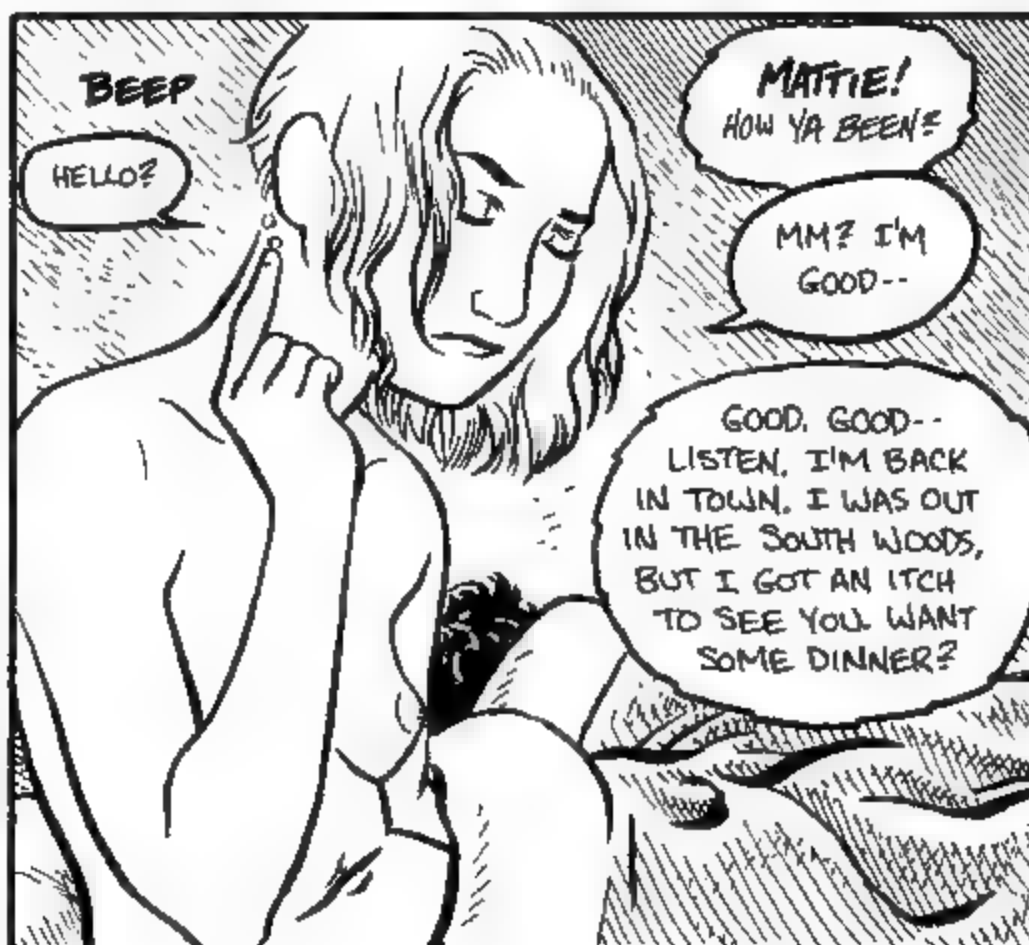


DOOT
DYET
NIT
DOOP
DIP



≡BEEP≡

≡BEEP≡



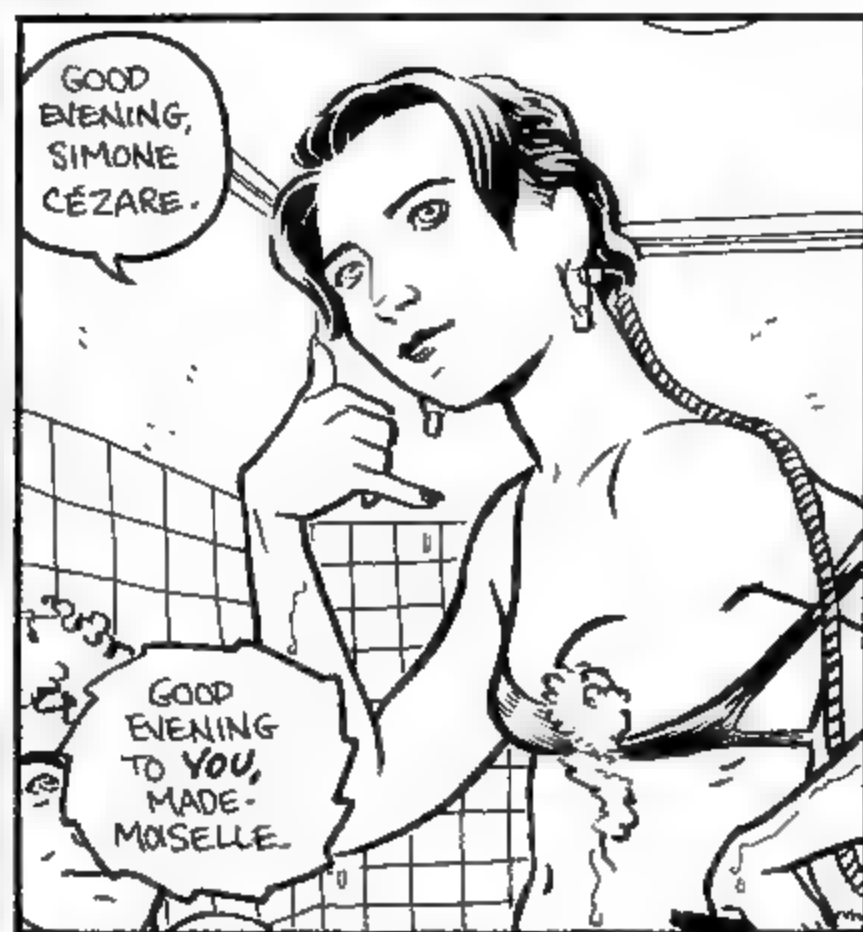
BEEP

HELLO?

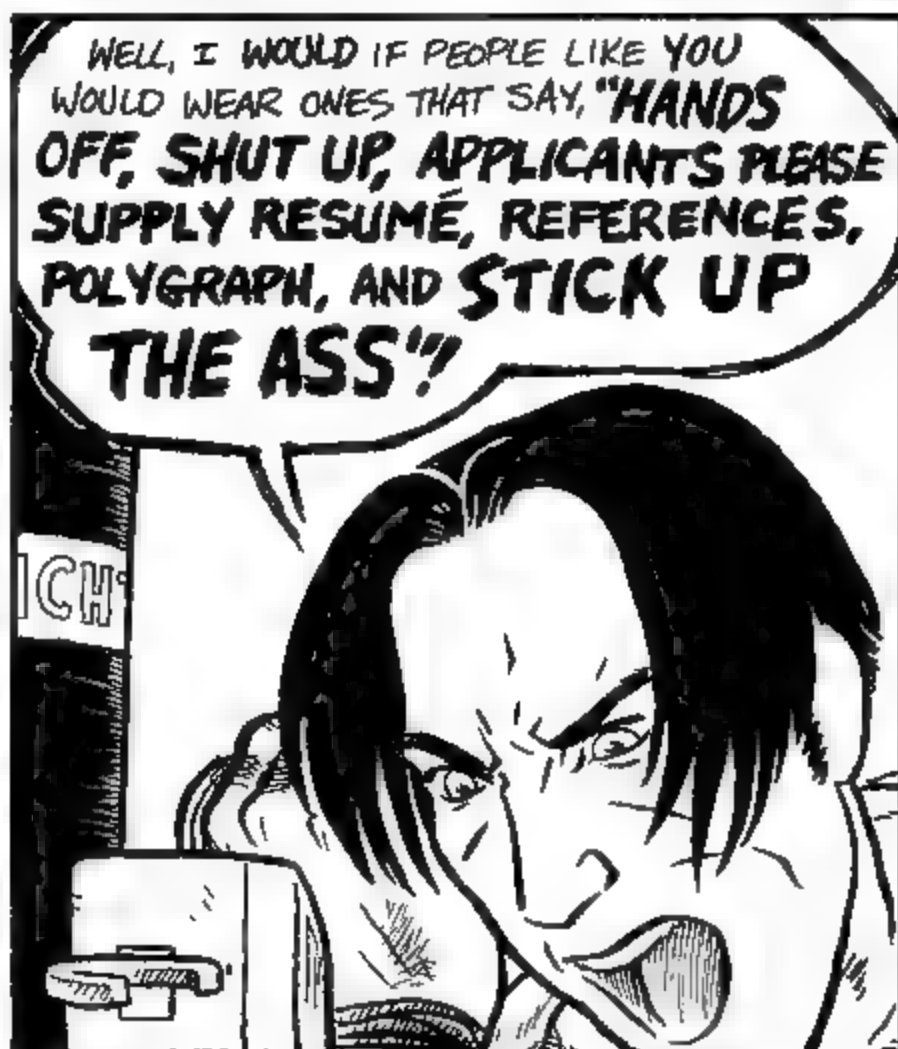
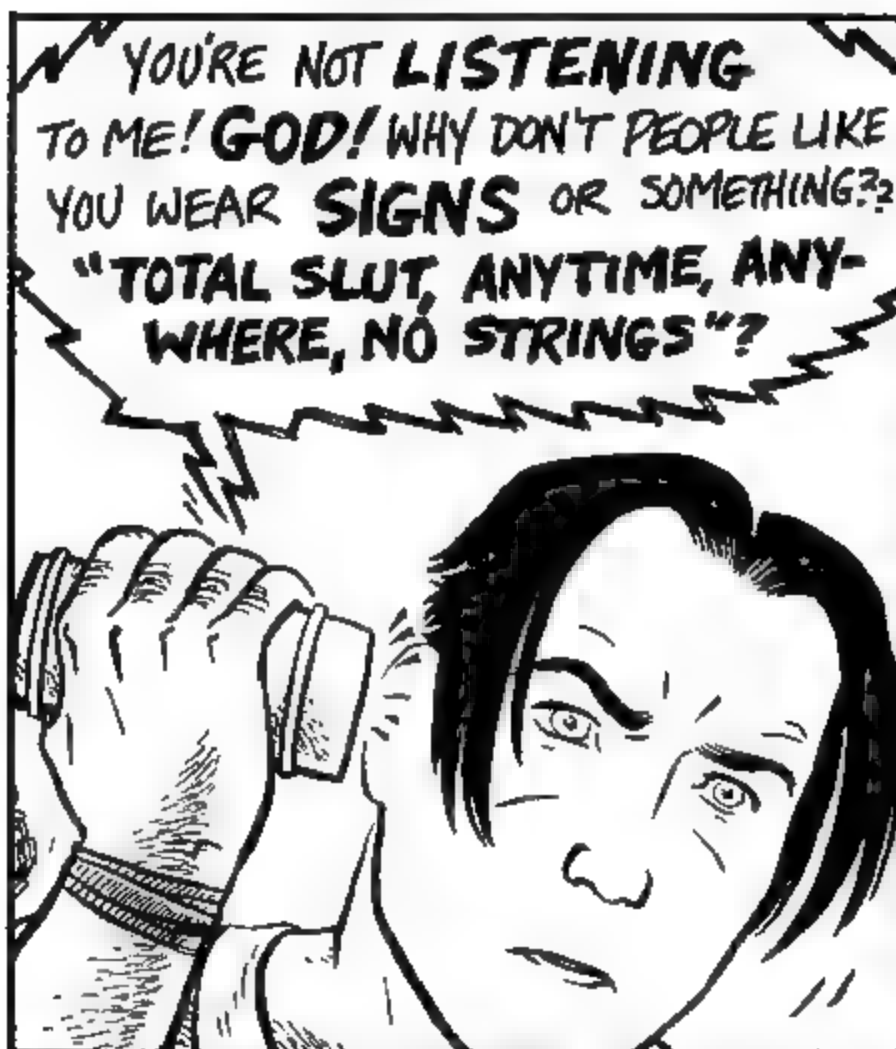
MATTIE!
HOW YA BEEN?

MM? I'M
GOOD--

GOOD, GOOD--
LISTEN, I'M BACK
IN TOWN. I WAS OUT
IN THE SOUTH WOODS,
BUT I GOT AN ITCH
TO SEE YOU. WANT
SOME DINNER?









DAMN,
TOWNIE WOMEN
ARE WEIRD!

THE LAST TIME
I WAS IN THIS PART OF
TOWN, THEY WERE BENDING
GOLF CLUBS OVER EACH
OTHER'S HEADS TO
GET TO ME!



NOW I'M LIKE A
LEPER IN A PUBLIC
BATH! BEEN A FIRE
SALE ON VIBRATORS
AROUND HERE?

SNERKKE



HEH-HEH-HEH
JAEGER, YOU
KILL ME.

HEH-
HEH-HEH

WHAAT? HELL, I CAN
SLEEP ANYWHERE--



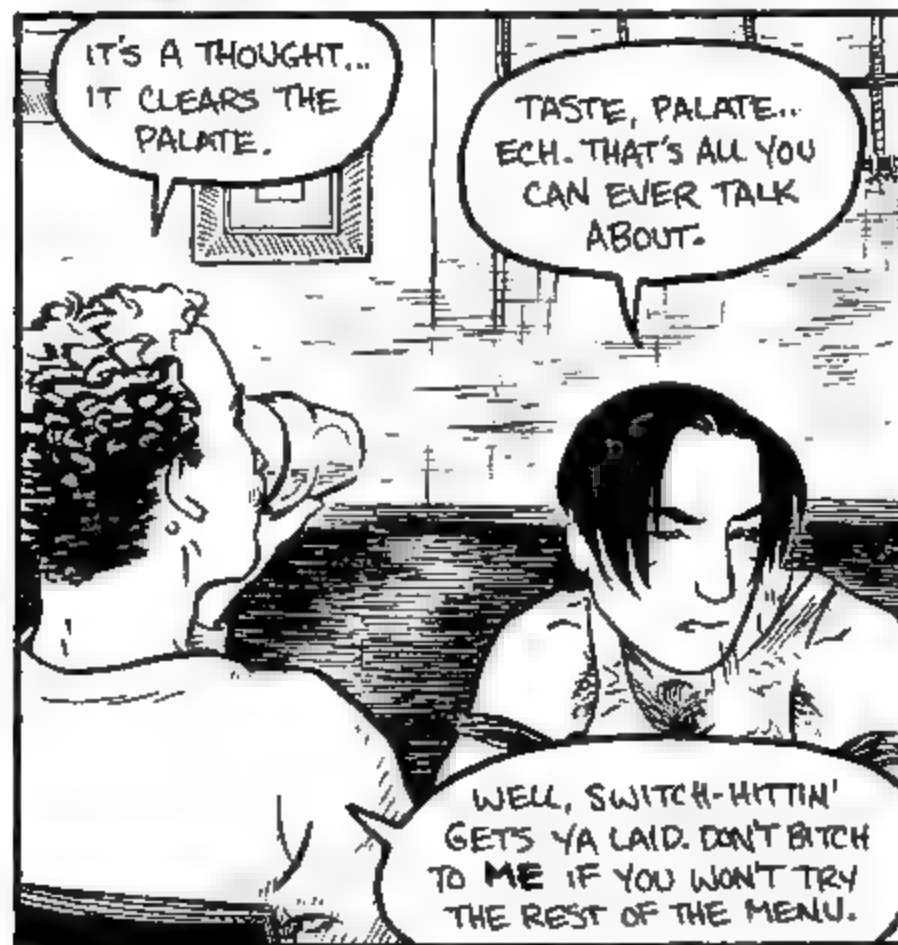
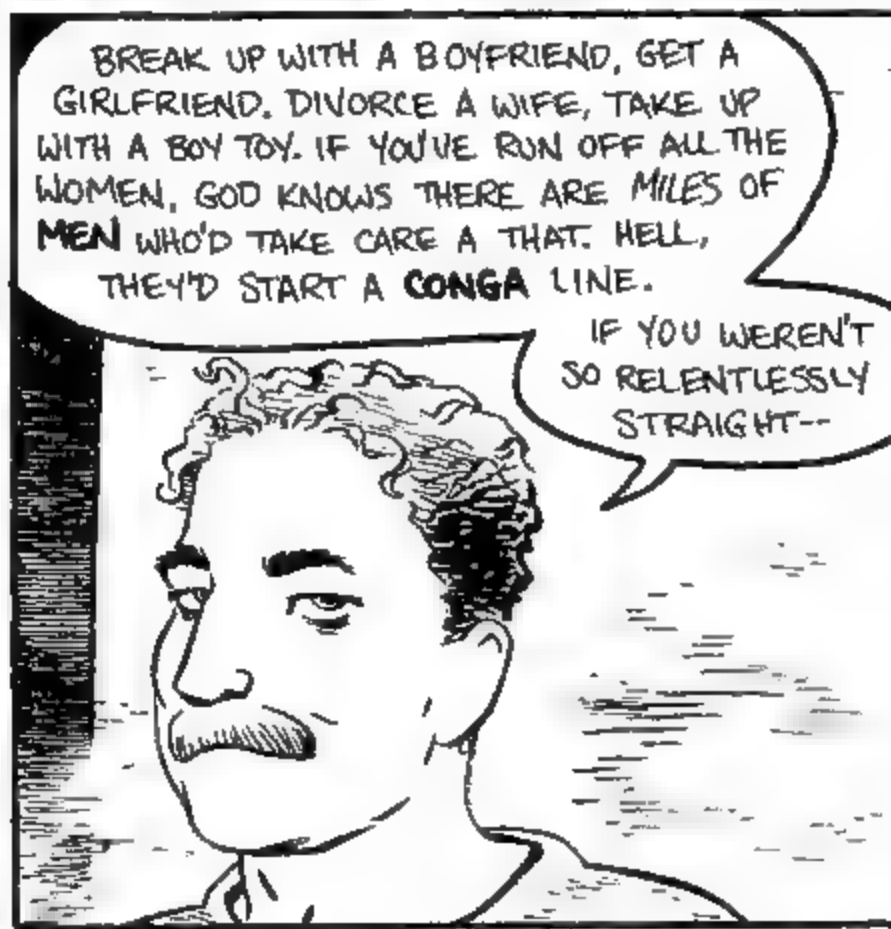
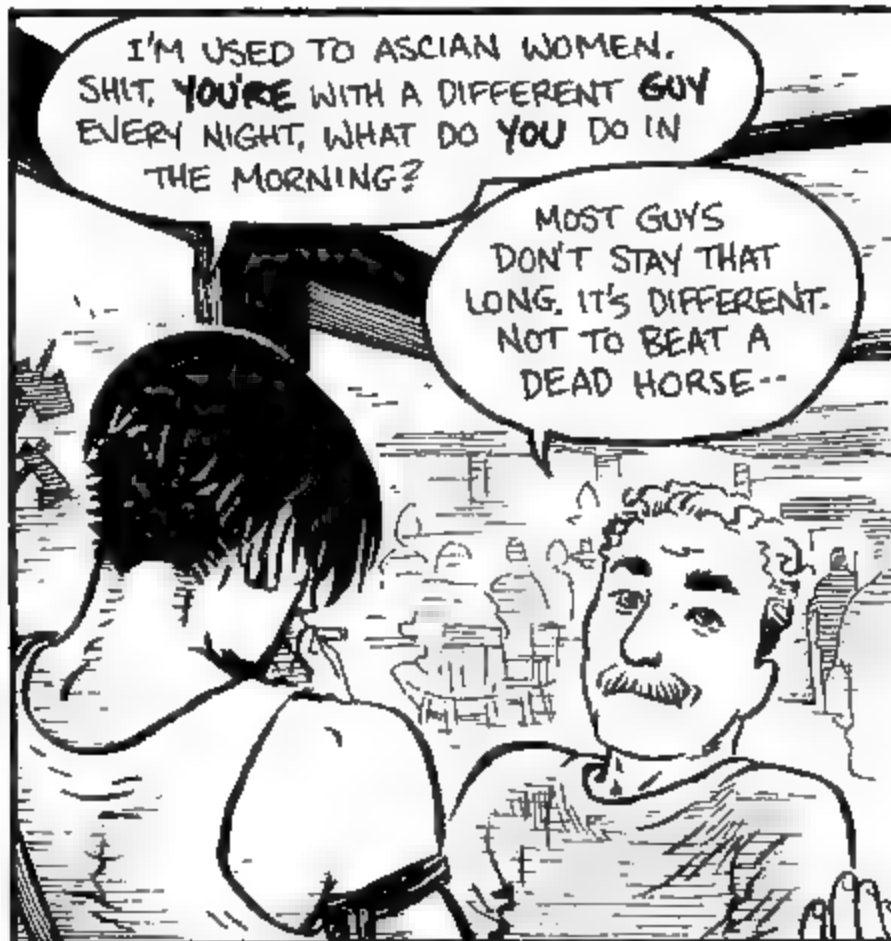
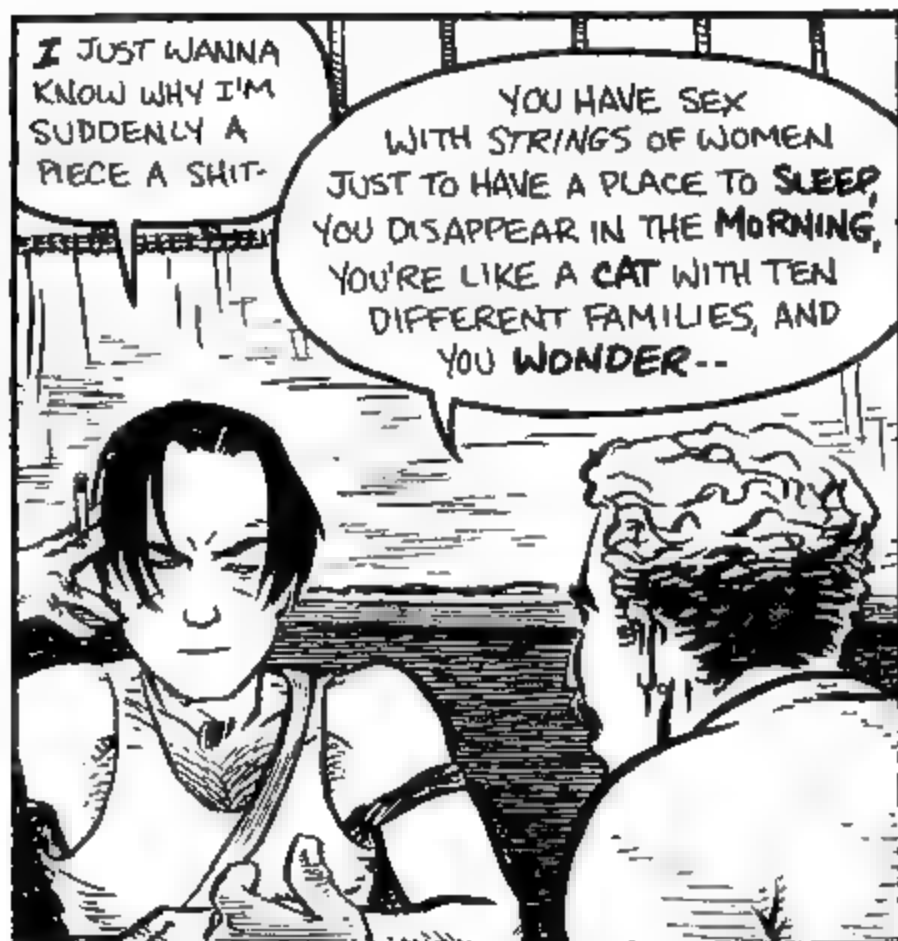
-- IF I WANTED TO SLEEP
IN A TREE I COULDA STAYED
OUTSIDE WHERE IT DON'T
STINK SO BAD.

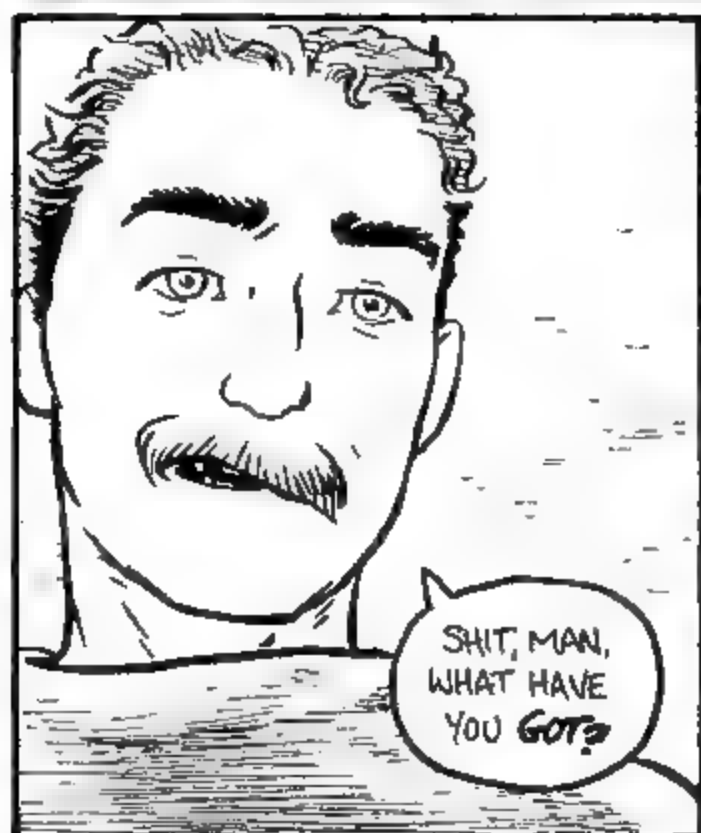
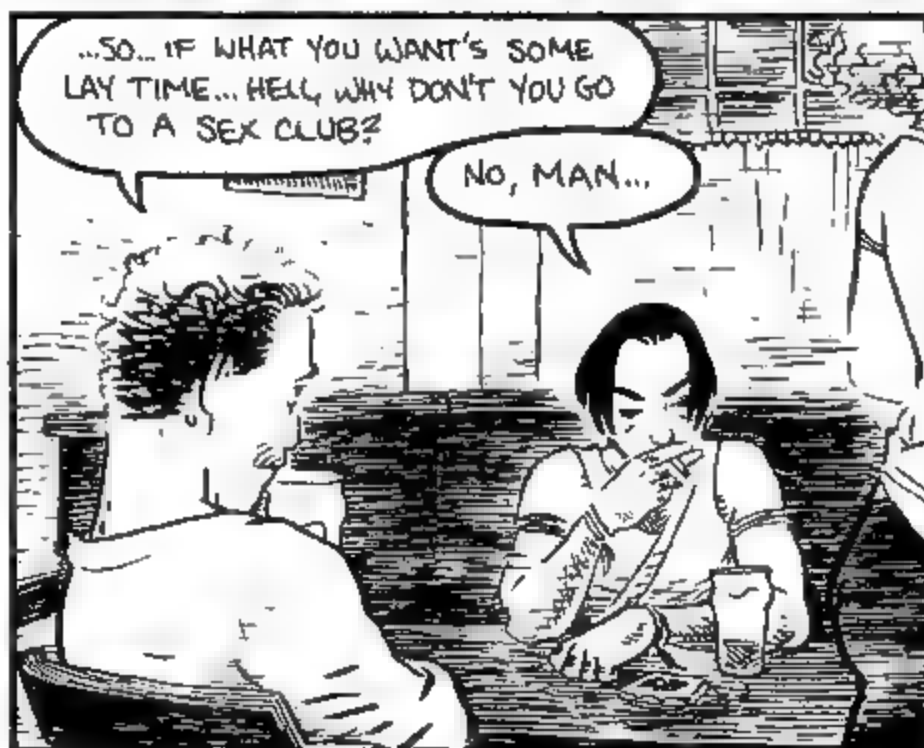
ALL I WANT'S
SOME CLEAN SHEETS
AND HOT WATER. I'LL STAY
OUT OF THEIR HAIR--

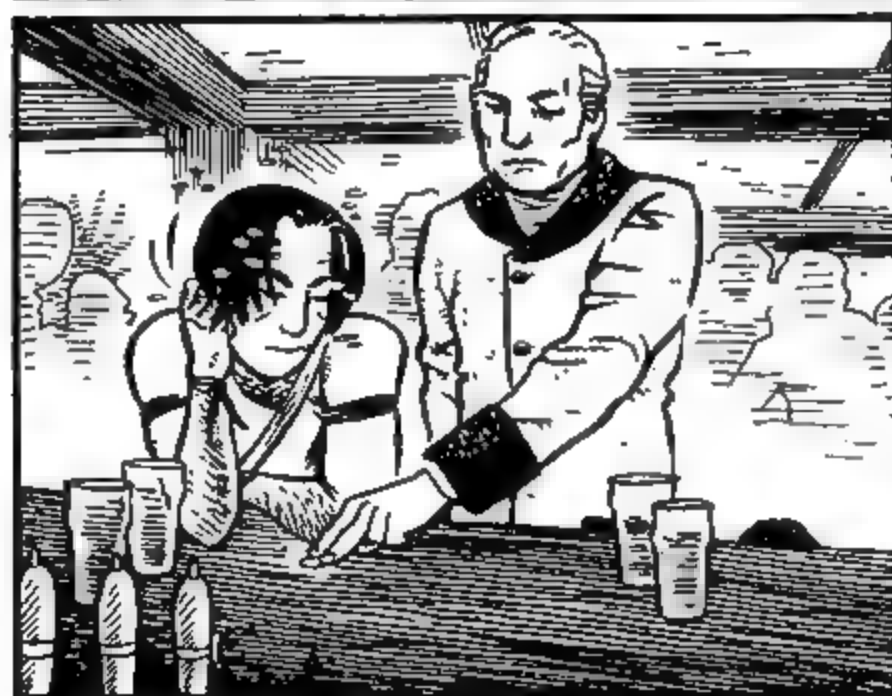


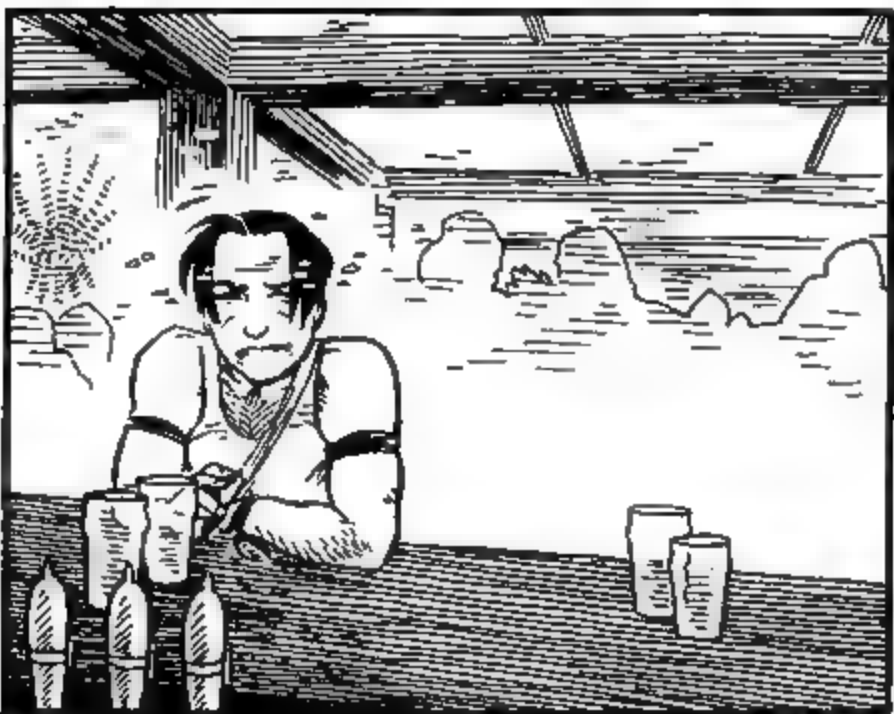
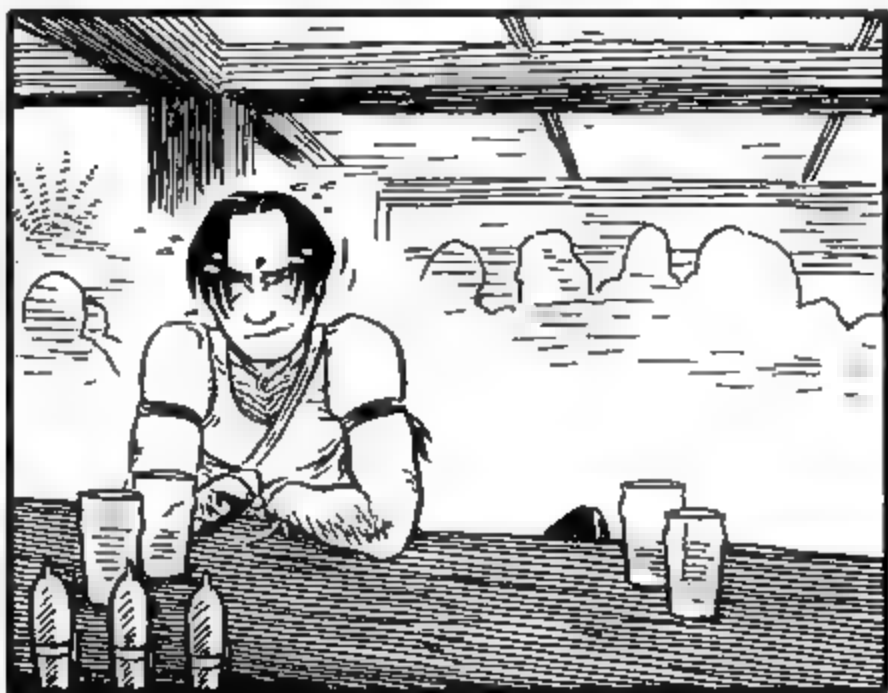
YOU NEED A
PLACE TO STAY,
MAN, JUST
ASK--

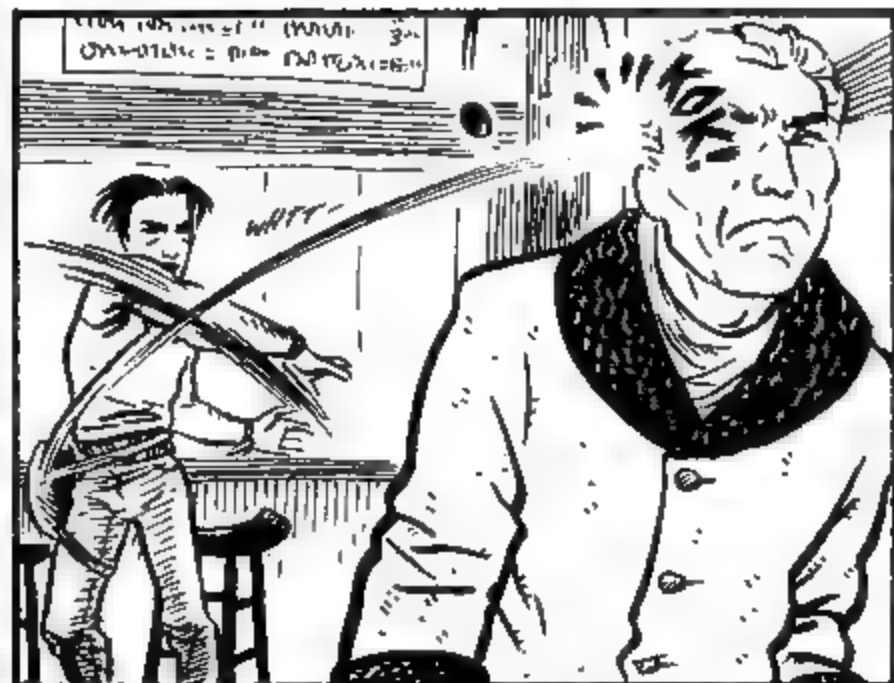
NOOO, NO. THANKS, NO
THANKS. NOTHING PERSONAL,
I APPRECIATE IT, BUT IT'S
NOT WHAT I CAME IN
FOR.

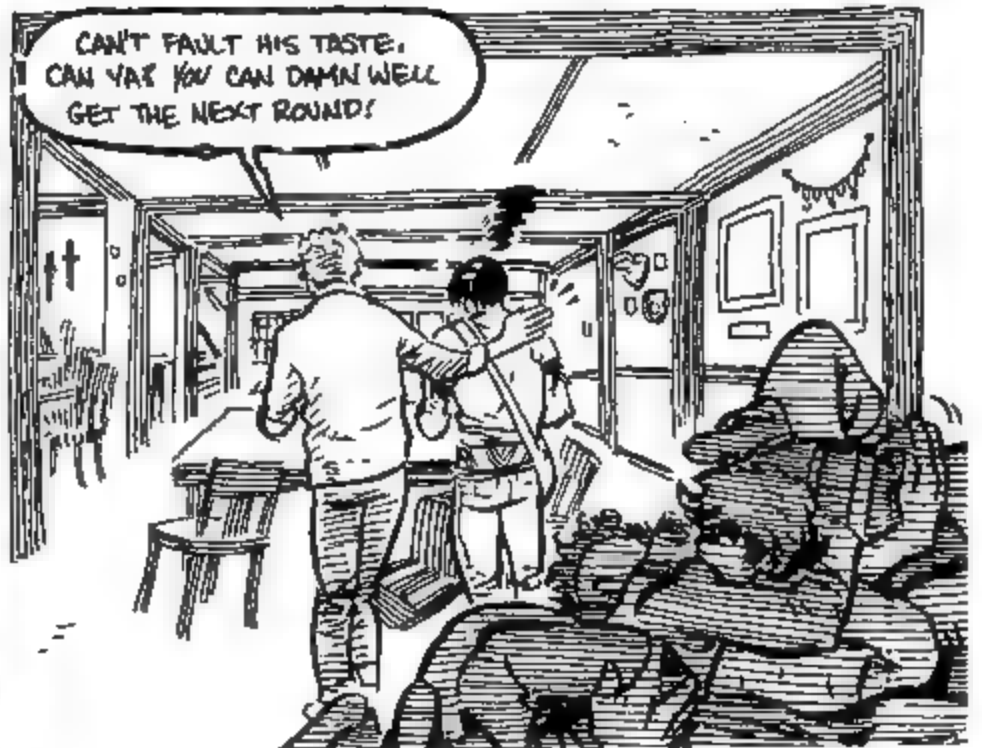
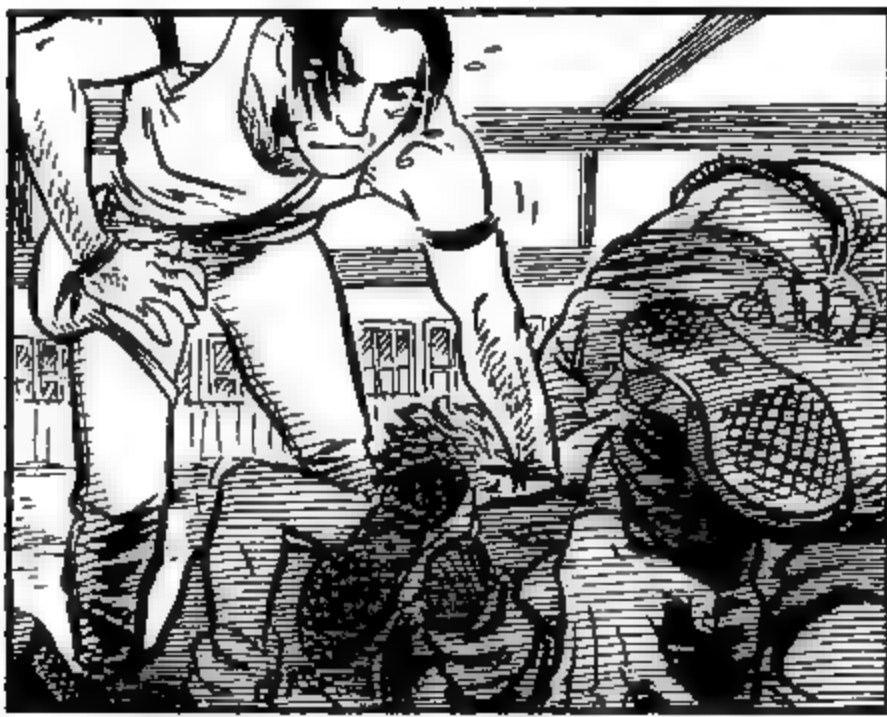


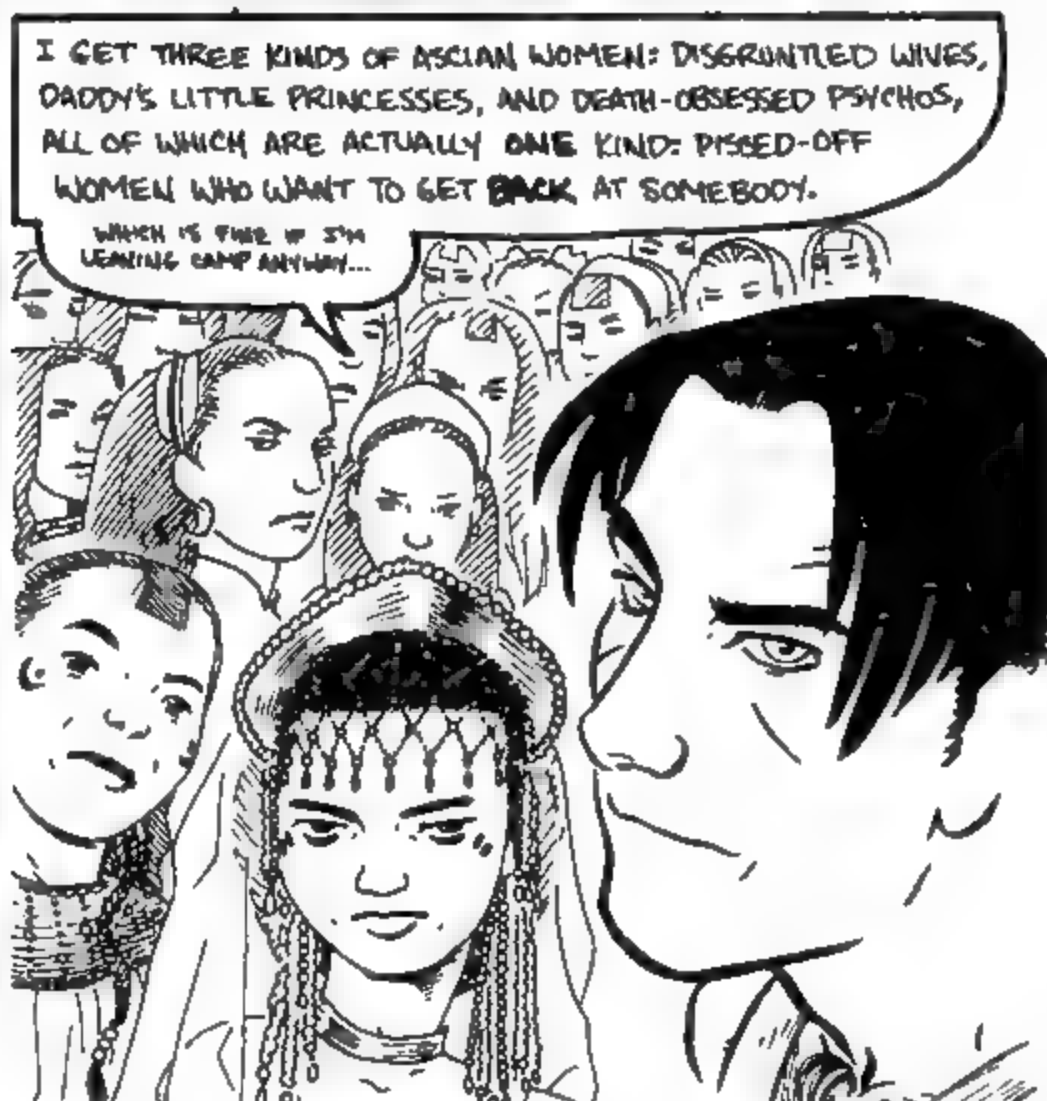
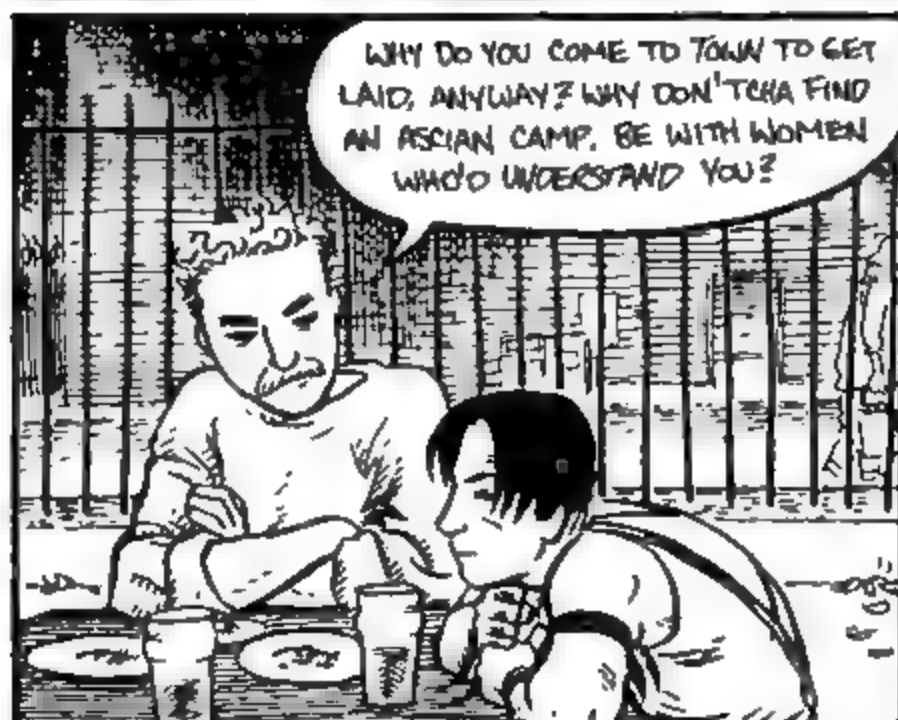
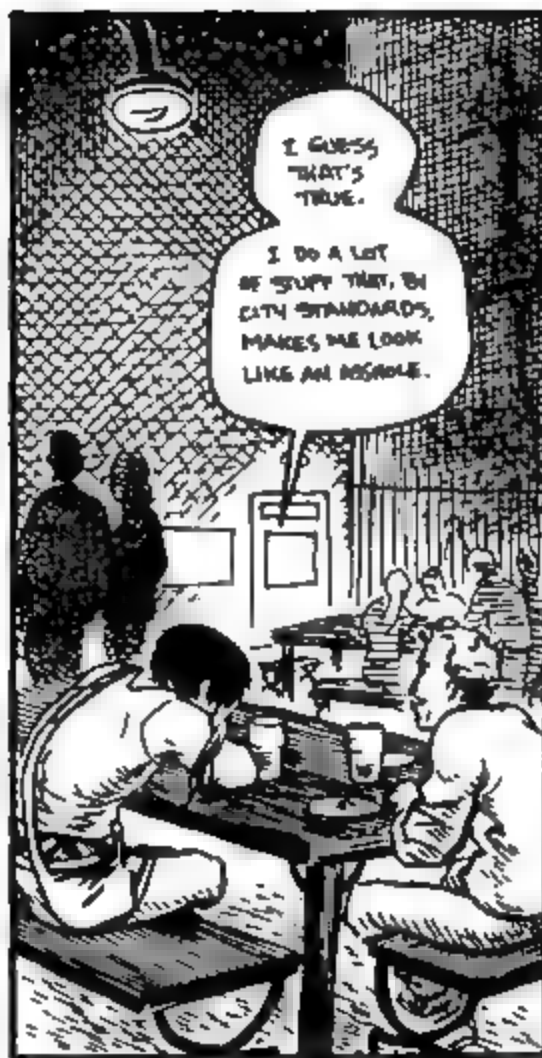












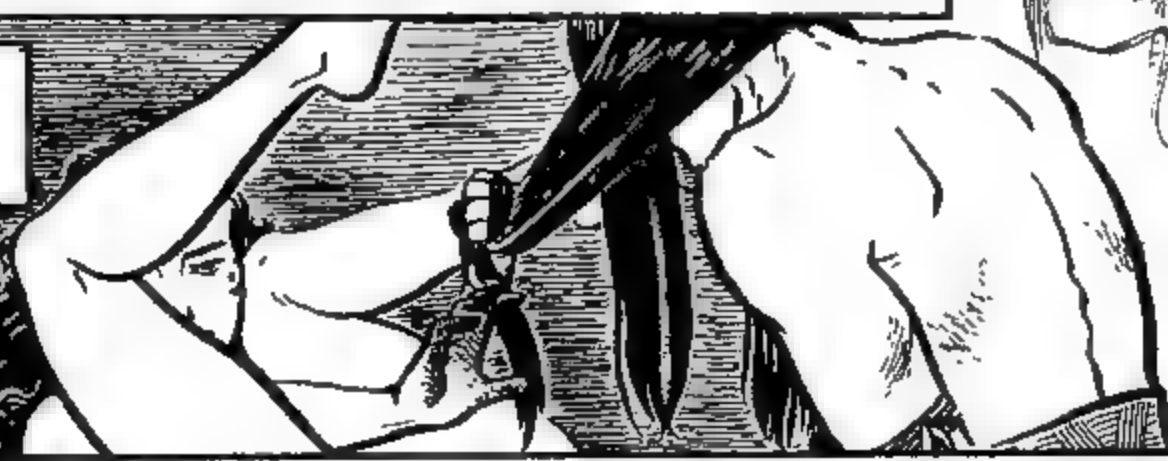
SO I DID A HELL OF A LOT OF STUFF WITH THEM THAT THEY THOUGHT WAS JUST GHASTLY DIRTY, AND WOULD NEVER DO WITH A POTENTIAL HUSBAND... I WAS A DUMB, HORNY TEENAGER. I THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD DEAL.



THIS ONE GIRL, SHE WAS CRAZY ON A STICK. I SHOULDA KNOWN IT THE FIRST DAY I MET HER, SHE DUMPED SOURED-OUT LIQUOR MASH DOWN MY NECK AND THEN JUMPED ON ME...

FIRST FOUR OR FIVE TIMES, THOUGH, IT WAS GREAT. SHE WAS NICE AND LIMBER--

THEN SHE STARTS IN, WANTING TO DO IT WHEN SHE'S ON HER MOON TIME-- BIG NO-NO, ASIDE FROM BEING GROSS AS HELL--



--THEN SHE WANTS TO, Y'KNOW, KILL A LIZARD OR SOMETHING BEFOREHAND AND USE THE BLOOD-- TELLS ME IT'S THIS SUPER-SECRET WOMEN'S RITUAL, WHICH IS BULLSHIT, SHE'S MAKING IT ALL UP, BUT WHAT DO I KNOW?

I'M GETTING MORE AND MORE FREAKED OUT, BUT I COULDN'T SAY NO, SO I GOT ROUGHER AND ROUGHER, THINKING SHE'D GET FED UP AND LEAVE-- I FIGURED A BOUT OF RODEO SEX WOULD PUSH HER OVER THE EDGE FOR SURE--



"RODEO SEX"?

"UH, YEAH... I'D DO HER FROM BEHIND, THEN WHEN SHE WAS INTO IT I'D CALL 'ER A FAT NASTY HAG- CHILD OR SOME SHIT, THEN, LIKE, HANG ON--"



"SNICKKK"

OH, THAT SHIT WASN'T FUNNY, MAN! IT PUSHED HER OVER THE EDGE ALL RIGHT... SHE KEPT COMING BACK FOR IT! SEEMED TO BE WHAT SHE WANTED... I COULDN'T SEE STRAIGHT. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE WANTED OR WHAT I WANTED OR WHAT WAS RIGHT.

I WAS THINKING I SHOULD TELL HER FUCKIN' BROTHERS ABOUT ALL THAT-- I JUST HADDA GET OUT OF THERE!



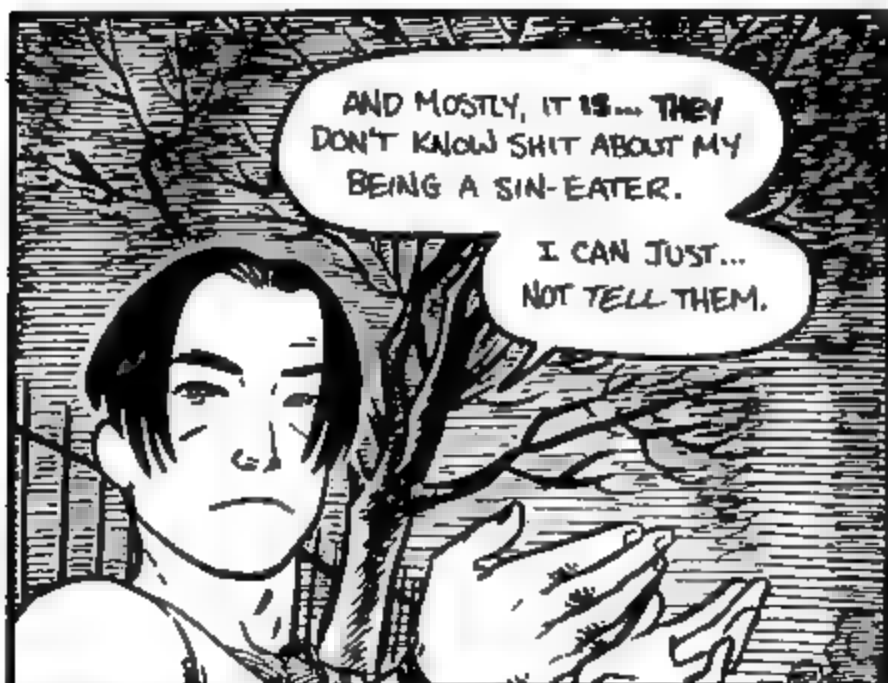
WHAT, THE ASIANS DIDN'T HAVE ANY NICE GIRLS?



NOT THAT WOULD THROW THEMSELVES AWAY ON A SIN-EATER.



SO... I STARTED CHASING
TOWN GIRLS, WHENEVER I
COULD. IT FELT LIKE A WAY
OUT OF THE CRAZY.



AND MOSTLY, IT IS... THEY
DON'T KNOW SHIT ABOUT MY
BEING A SIN-EATER.

I CAN JUST...
NOT TELL THEM.



CAN'T DO THAT
WITH ASCIANS.

THAT'S ONE LIE
I COULD NEVER
PULL OFF.



BACK IN THE DAY, I
HAD THIS AUNTIE. OLDER
THAN HELL.

EVERY TIME
I GOT LAID,
SHE KNEW.



ASCIAN GIRL, TOWN GIRL,
HULDRE GIRL... NO MATTER HOW
CAREFUL OR CAGEY I WAS,
SHE ALWAYS KNEW.

AND EVERY TIME
SHE DID THE SAME
THING.



SHE'D LOOK
ME UP AND
DOWN.

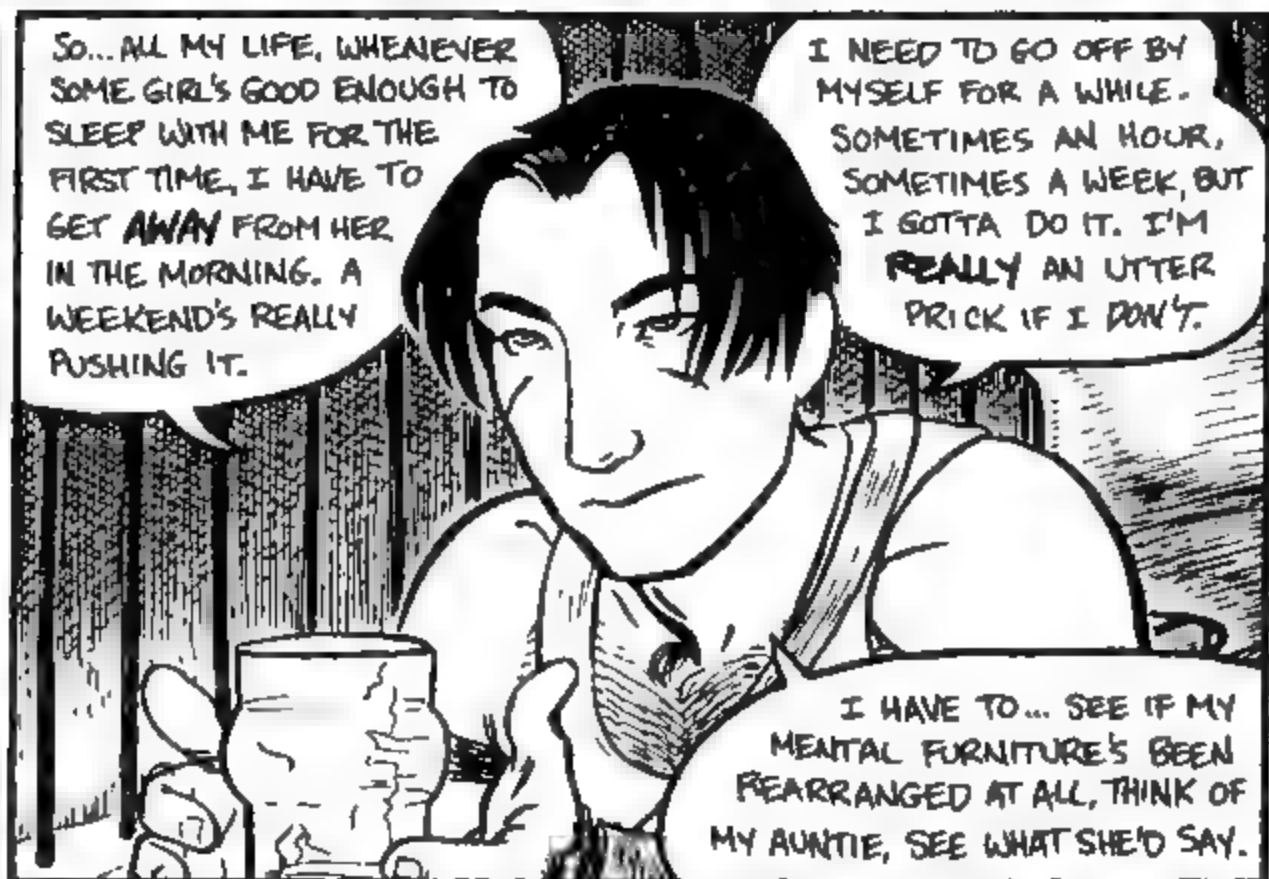
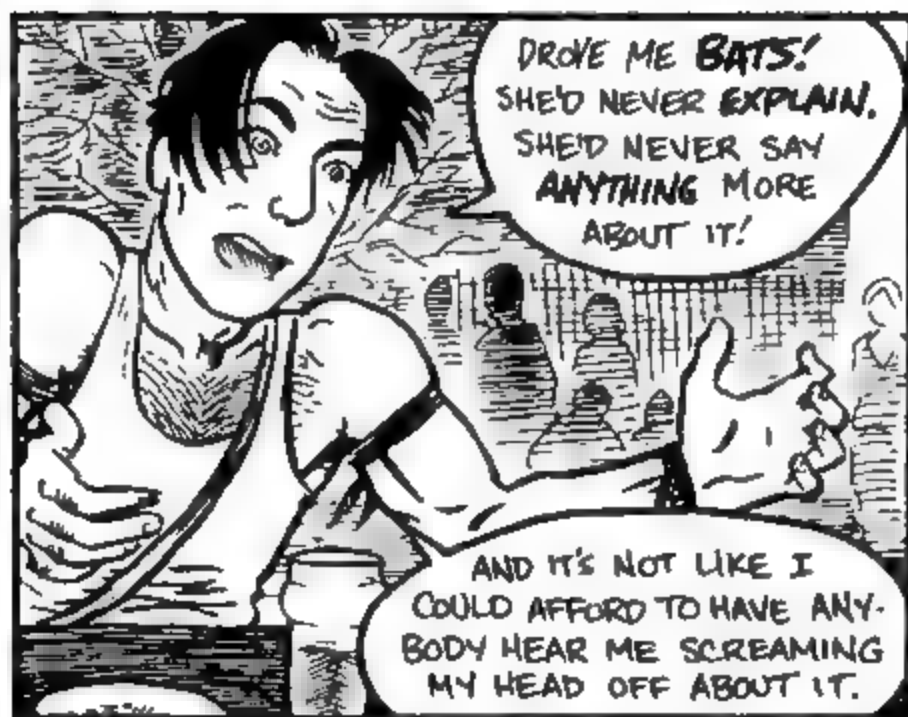
THEN SHE'D
LOOK ME IN THE
EYE FOR A LONG
MINUTE.



..THEN
SHE'D SAY--



IT'S NOT
LOVE.





EXCUSE ME.



NINE HOURS AGO, I BROKE OFF THE SINGLE MOST POINTLESSLY AGONIZING ONE-WAY RELATIONSHIP OF MY YOUNG LIFE.

IT WAS A THIN SLICE OF HELL AND NOW IT IS **OVER**. HE'S NOT MINE. HE NEVER WILL BE MINE AND I'VE THROWN AWAY THREE YEARS OF MY LIFE PINING AND HOPING.



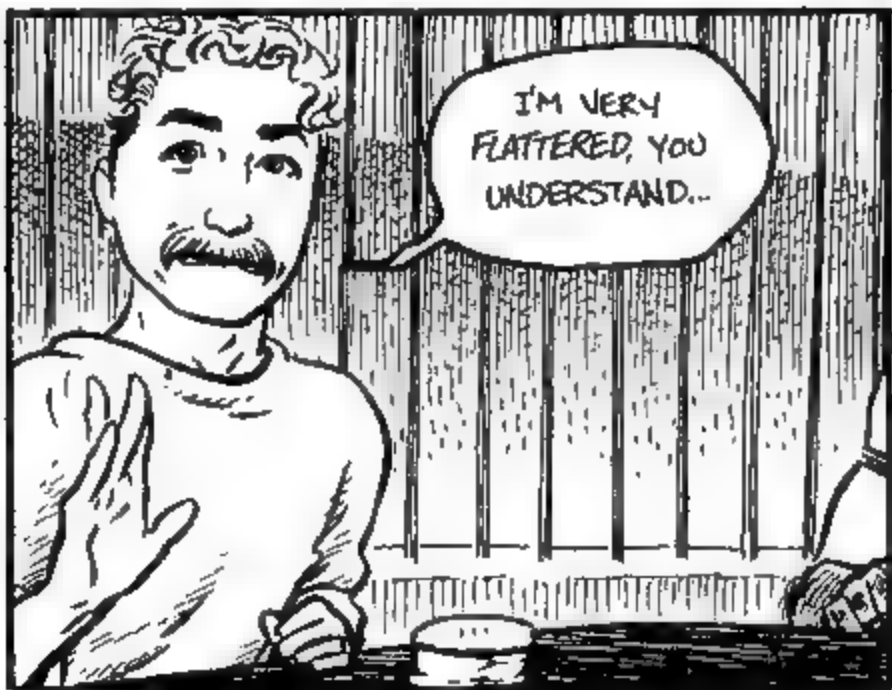
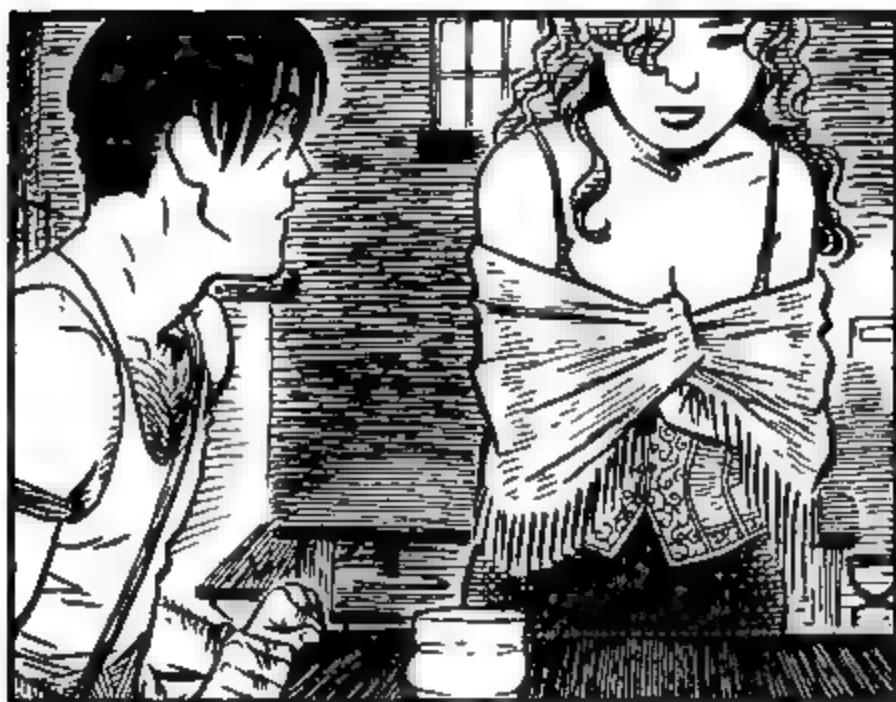
WELL, NOT ANYMORE, AND I NEED TO GET HIM OUT OF MY SYSTEM. I'VE GIVEN THE MATTER SERIOUS THOUGHT, AND ALL I WANT NOW IS FOR SOME TOTAL STRANGER TO NAIL ME TO A MATTRESS FOR THE NEXT FOURTEEN HOURS.

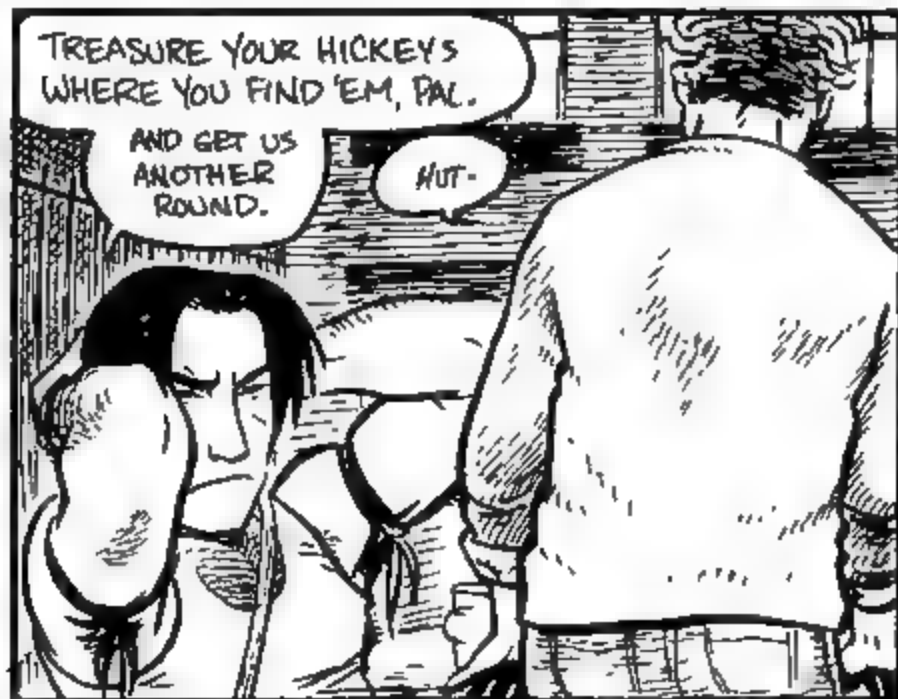
I WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CRY ALL OVER YOU AND CALL YOU BY HIS NAME, BUT I ASSURE YOU THAT MY SEXUAL FRUSTRATION HAS BUILT TO SUCH A FEVER PEAK THAT I WILL FUCK YOU **DRY**.

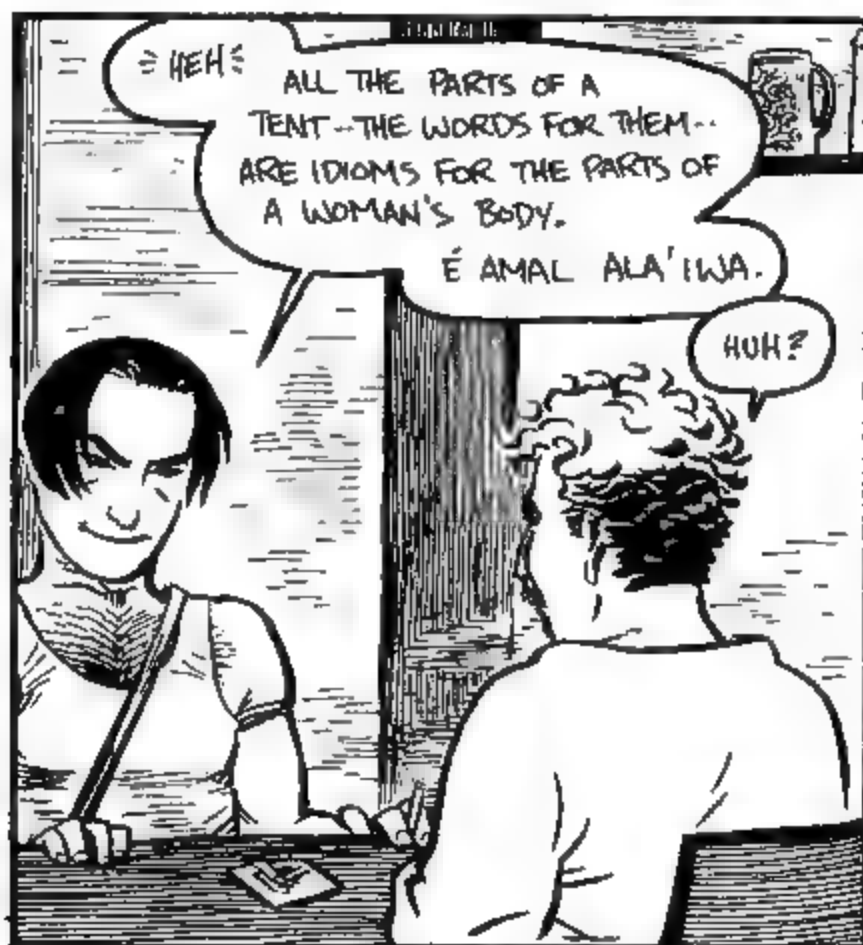
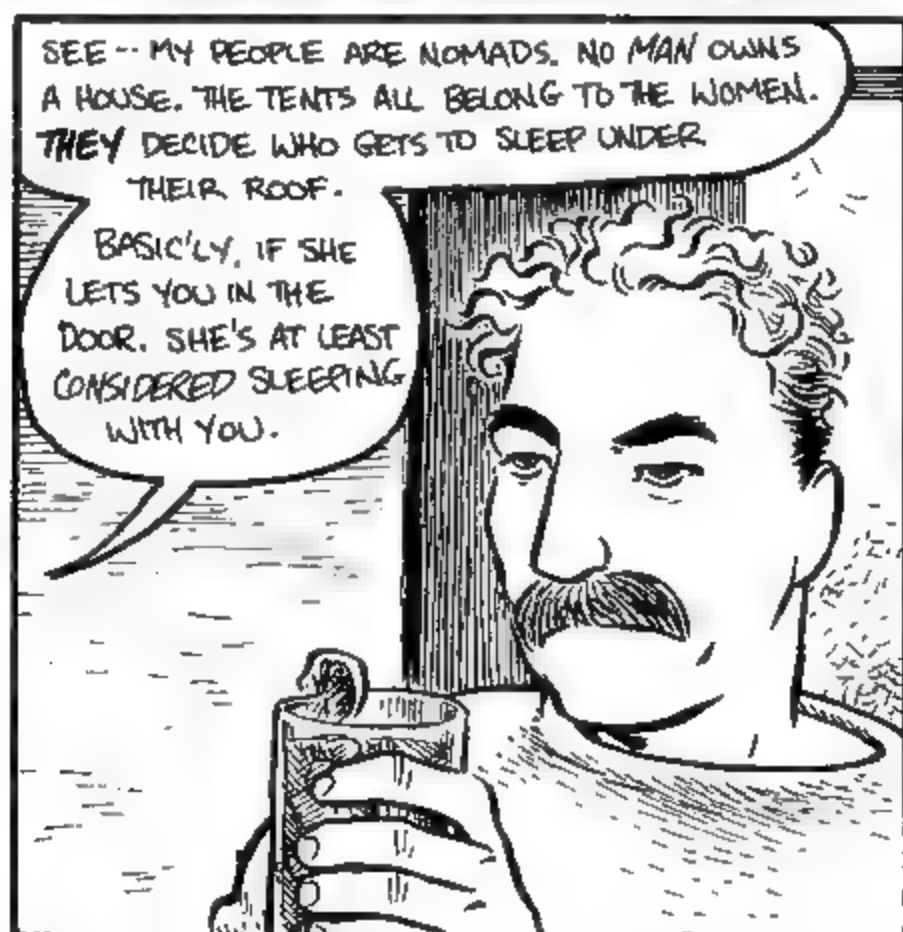
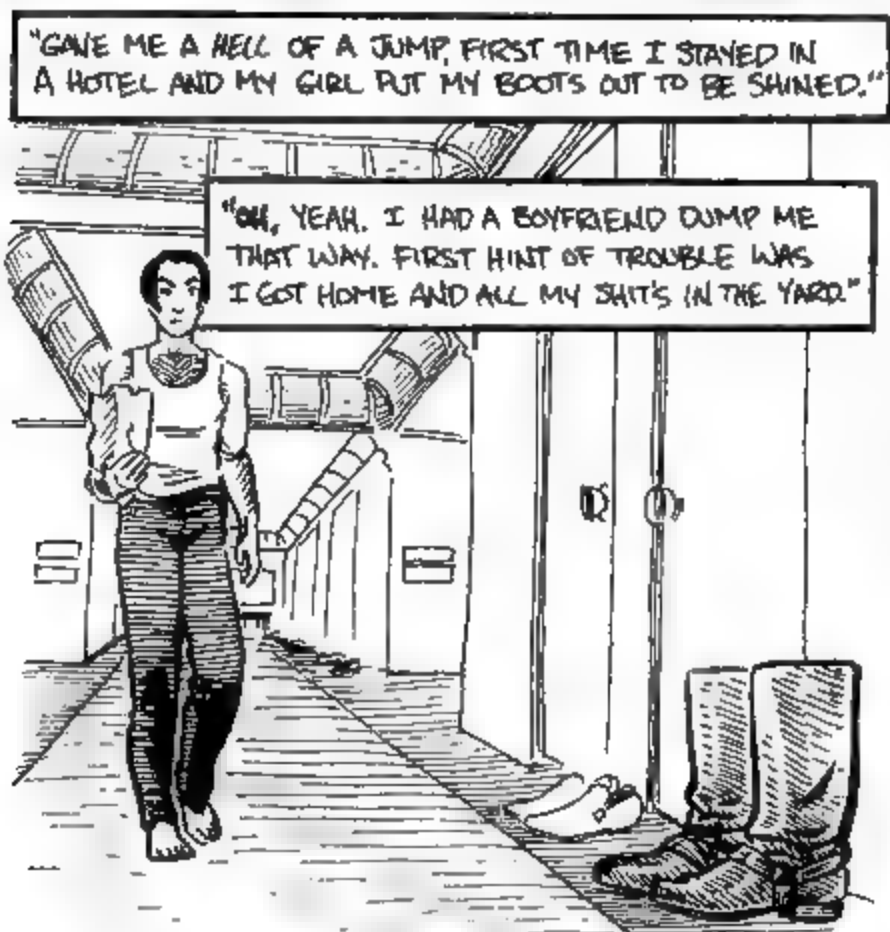
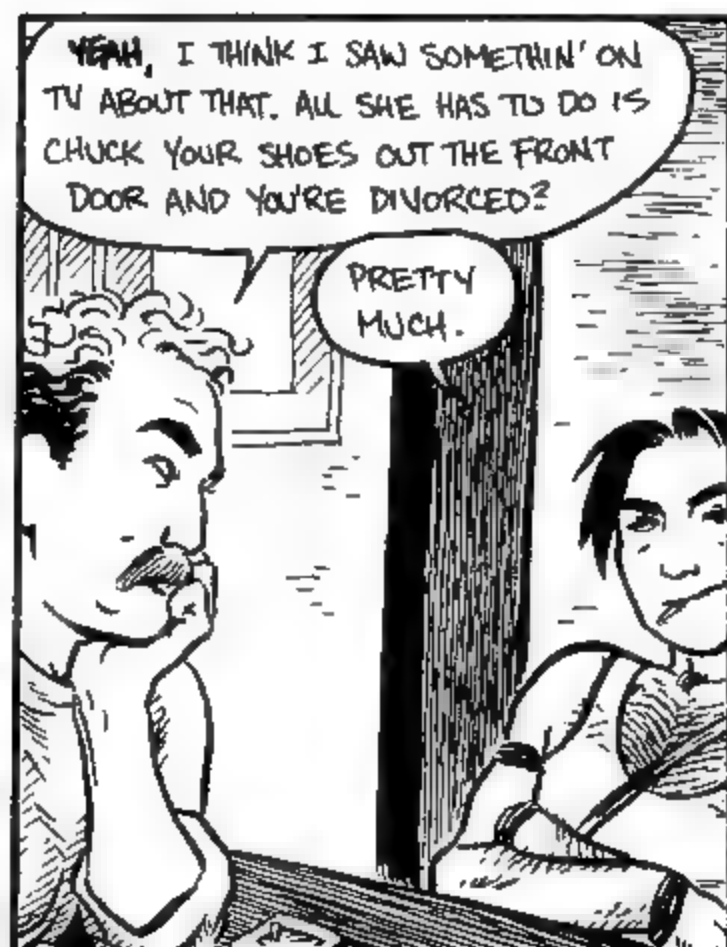
WHAT DO YOU SAY?

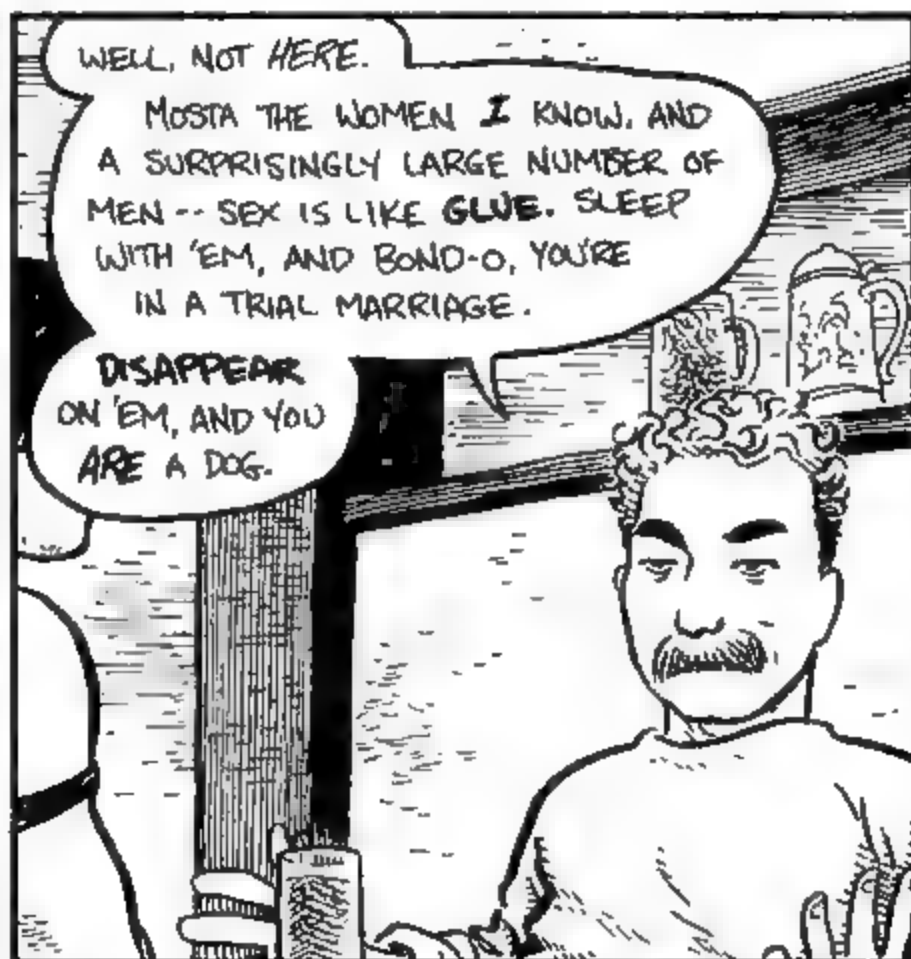


WHINE







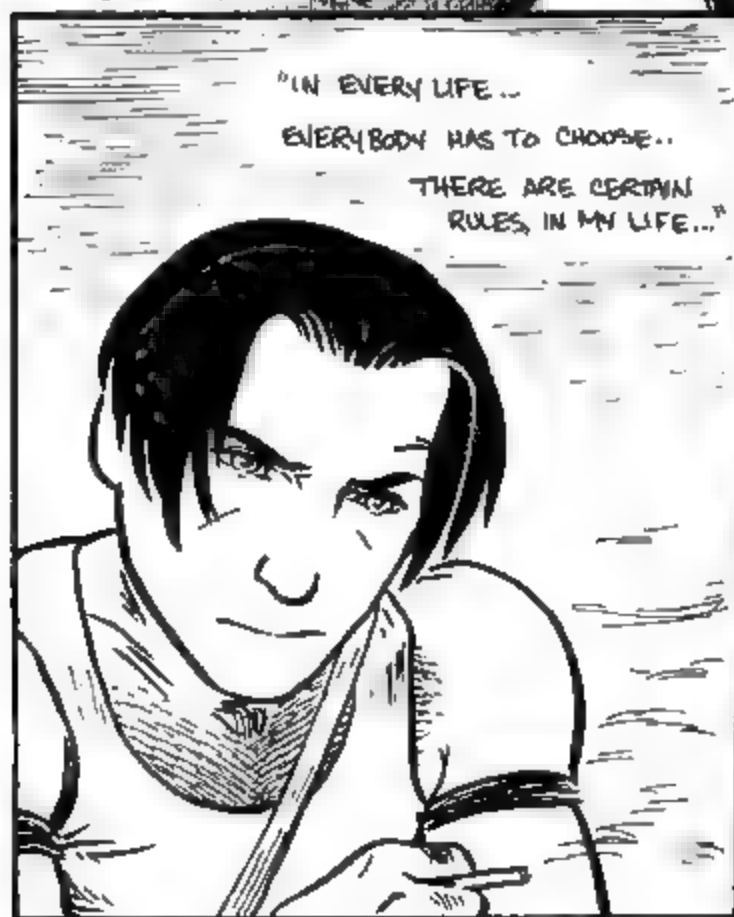




HE HAS ONE
FOOT IN DEATH
ALWAYS.

AND WHEN HE DIES,
HIS SPARK GOES OUT.
THERE IS NO SECOND
LIFE FOR HIM. YOU'LL
NEVER SEE HIM
AGAIN.

BE KIND TO
HIM IN THIS
LIFE. YOU WON'T
GET ANOTHER
CHANCE.



"IN EVERY LIFE...
EVERYBODY HAS TO CHOOSE...
THERE ARE CERTAIN
RULES IN MY LIFE..."

YOU STAY AWAY
FROM THOSE WHITE
GIRLS. THEY'RE RAISED
ALL WRONG. YOU KNOW
IT'S NOTHING BUT
TROUBLE.

STAY OFF OF
THOSE WEIRD-HEAD
GIRLS, TOO.

I'M NOT KIDDING.
STOP SMILING
AT ME.

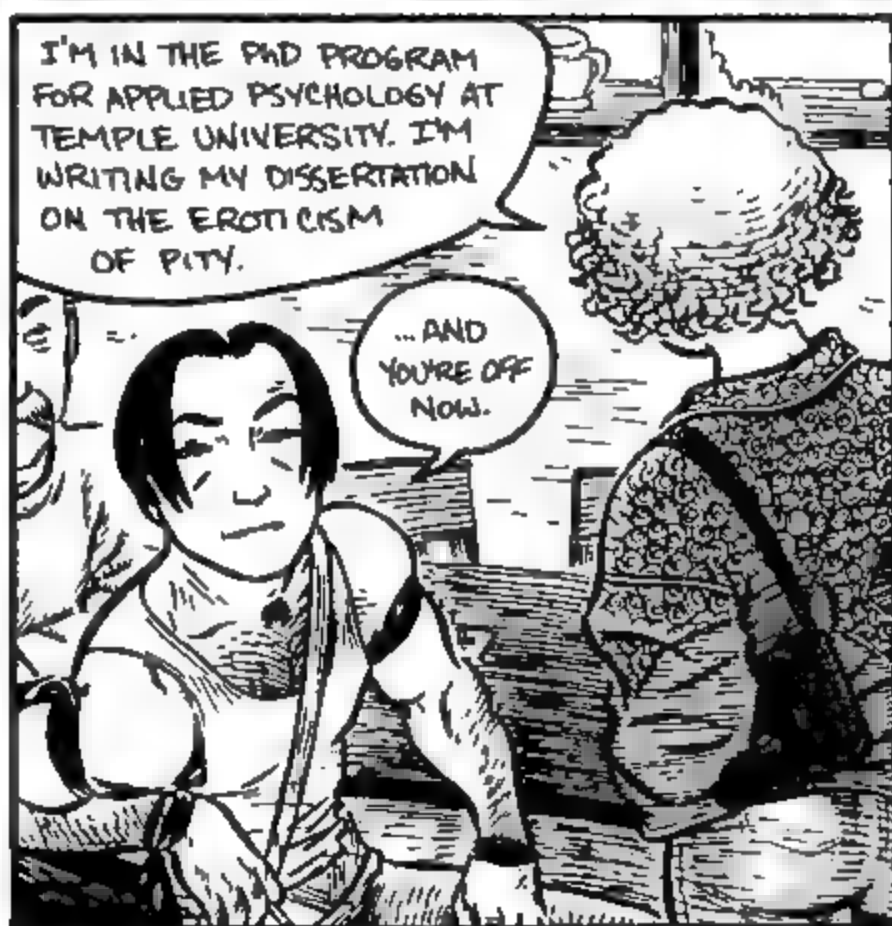


YOU'RE TOO PRETTY TO BE A SIN-EATER,
THAT'S THE TROUBLE. IF ONLY HE'D ADOPTED
YOU WHILE HE HAD THE CHANCE.

YOU'RE TO CUT
THIS HAIR AND KEEP
IT CUT. GIVEN THE
HAIR ON YOUR BODY
YOUR POOL OF
WIDOWS AND
ROUND HEELS WILL
SOON DRY UP.

BUT YOU
STAY AWAY
FROM THOSE
WHITE GIRLS



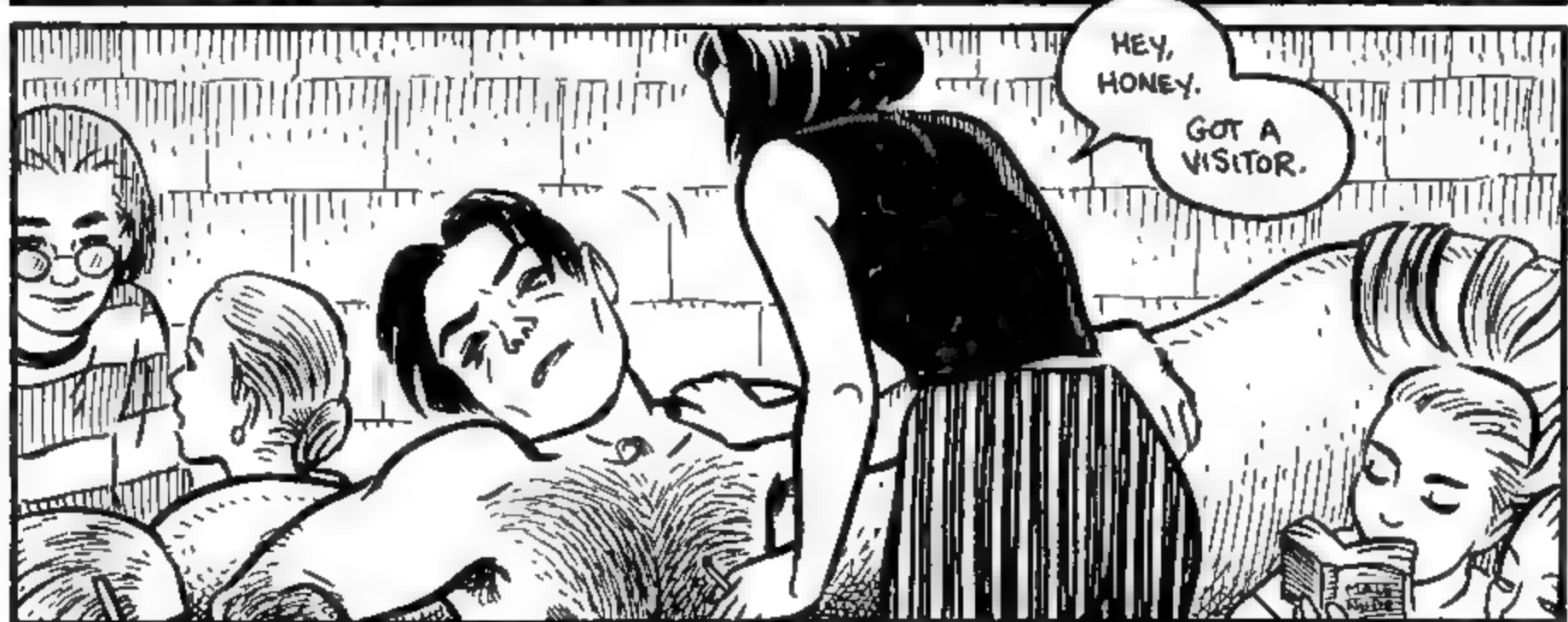
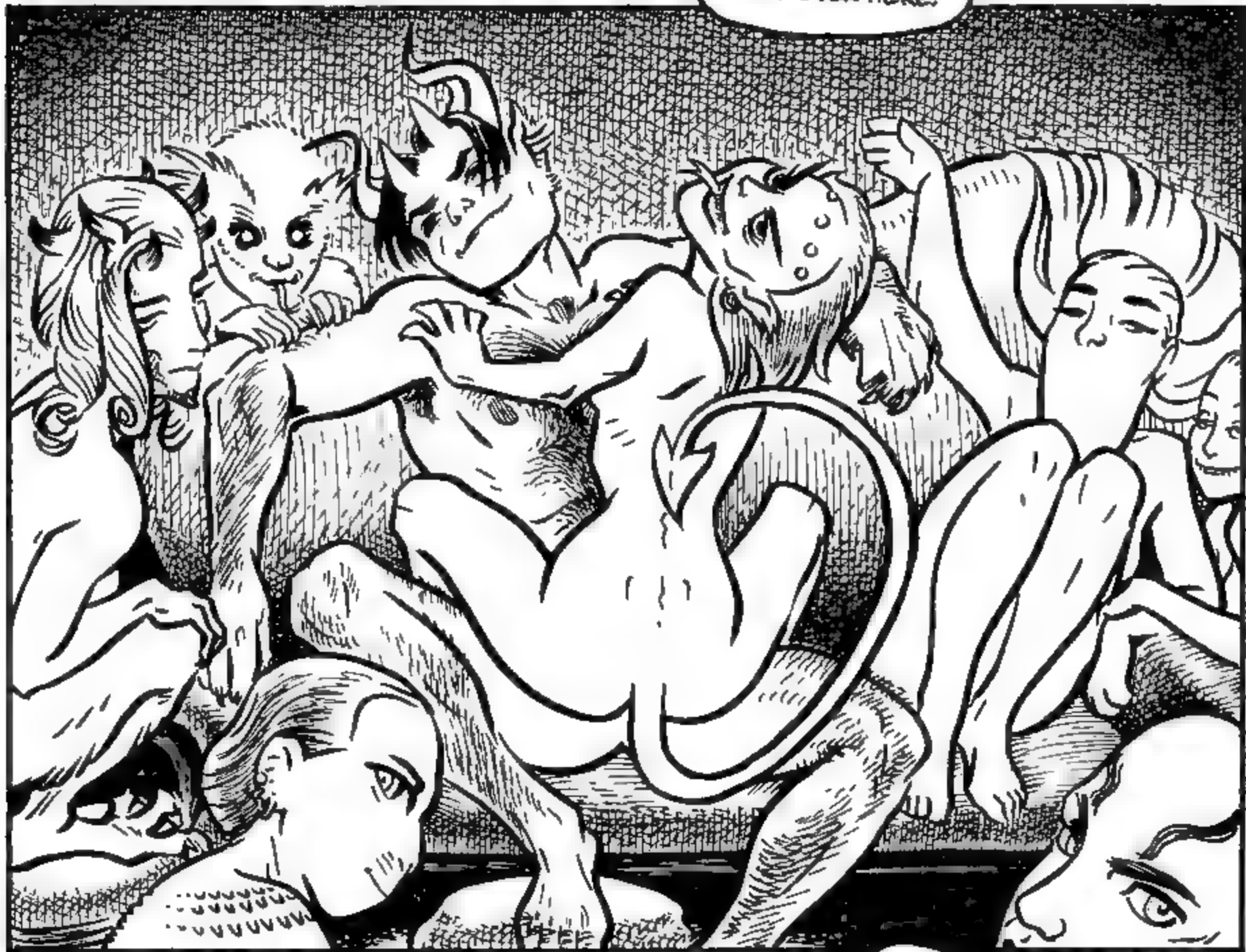


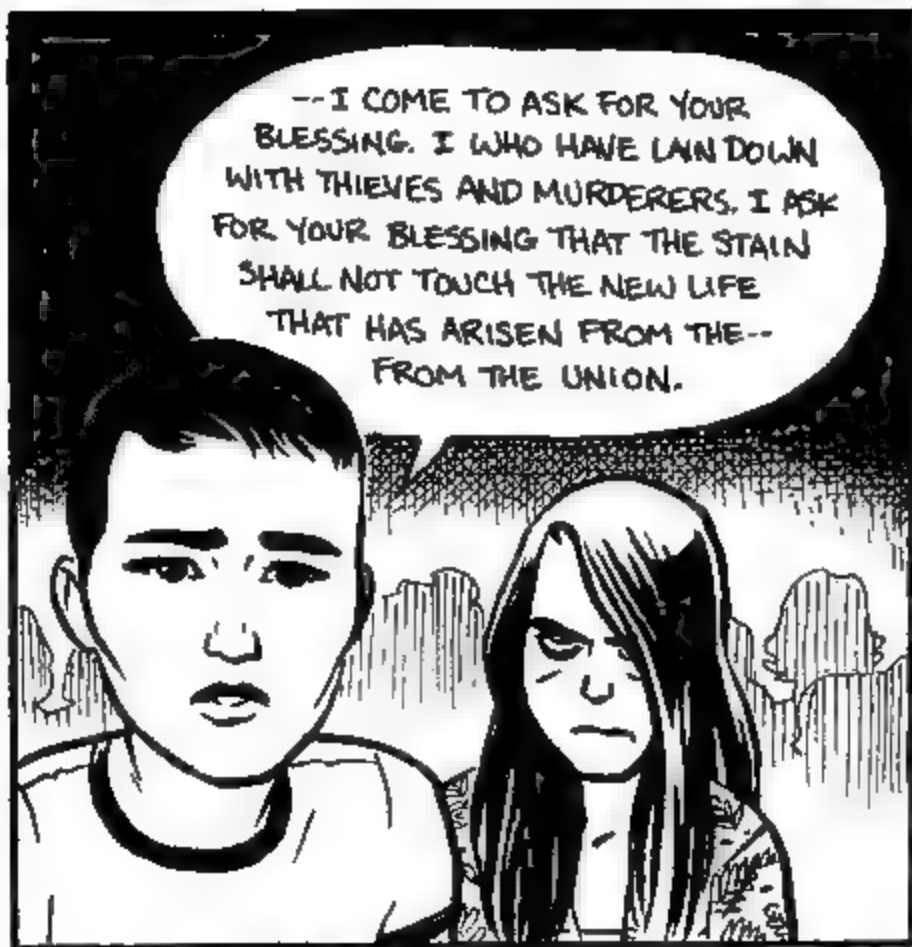
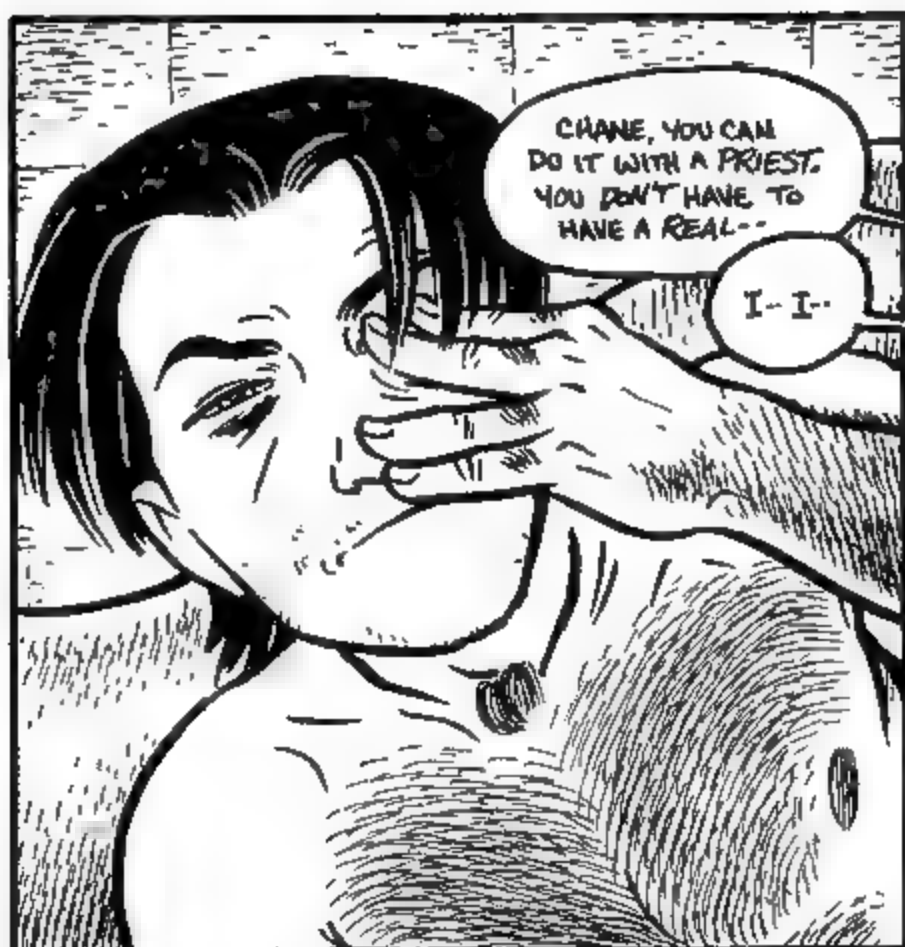


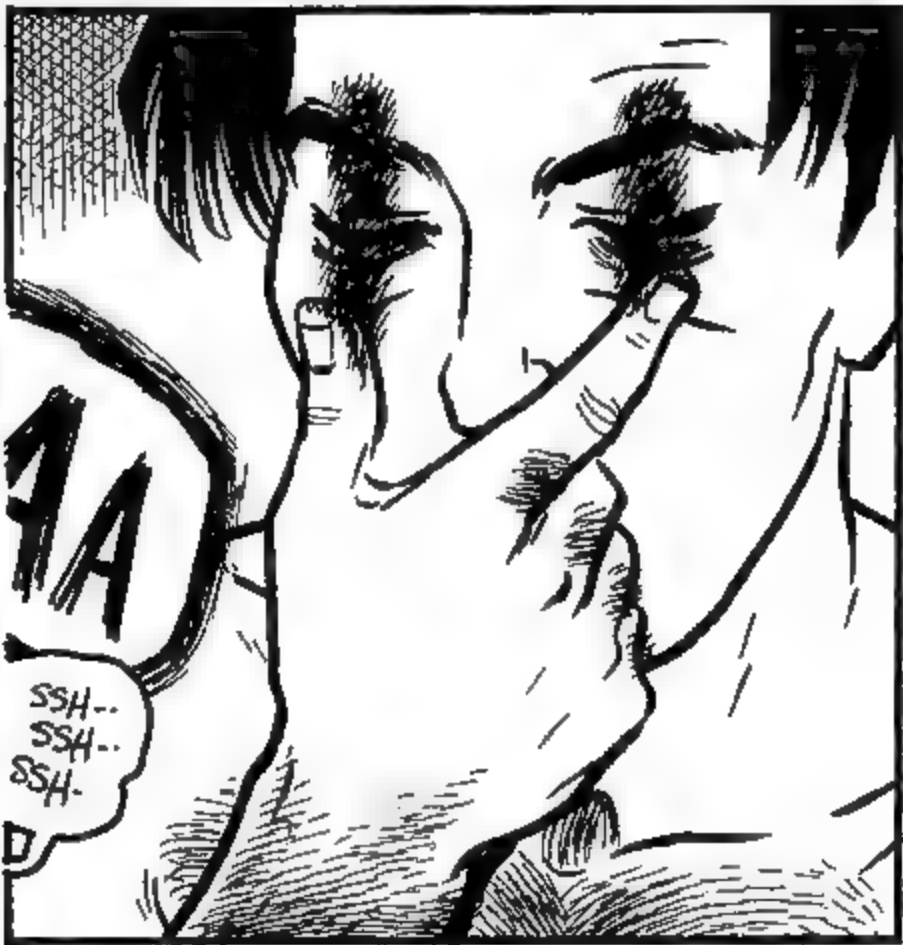
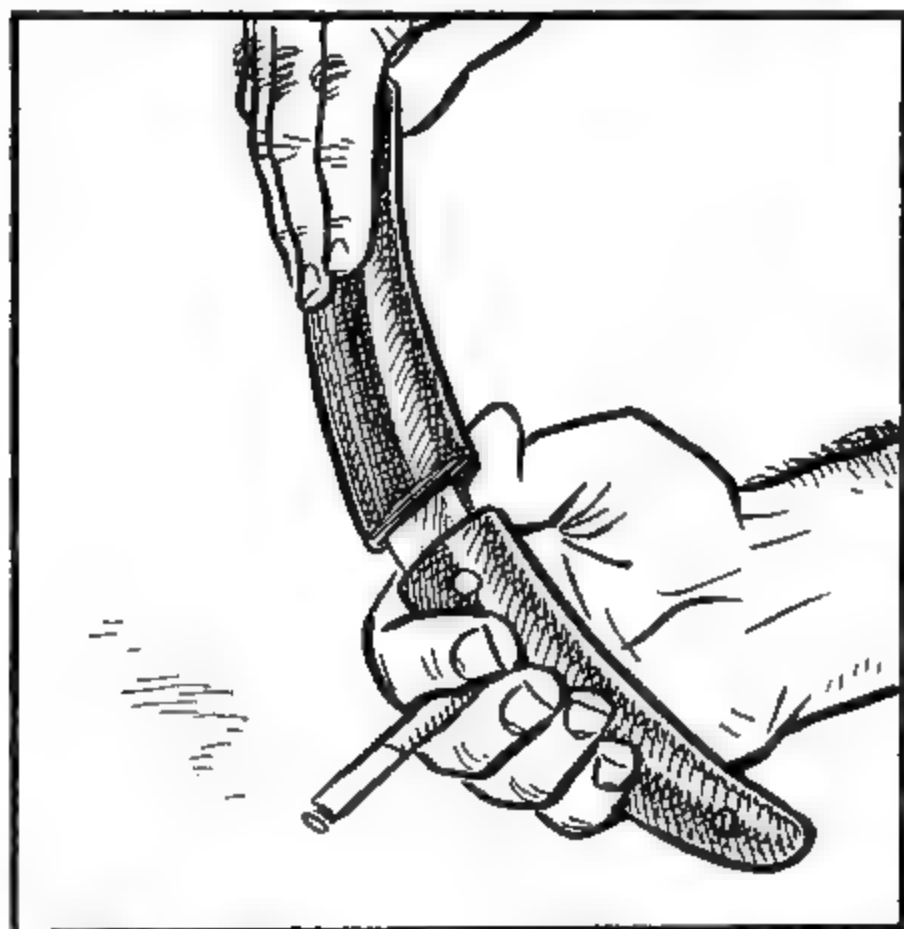
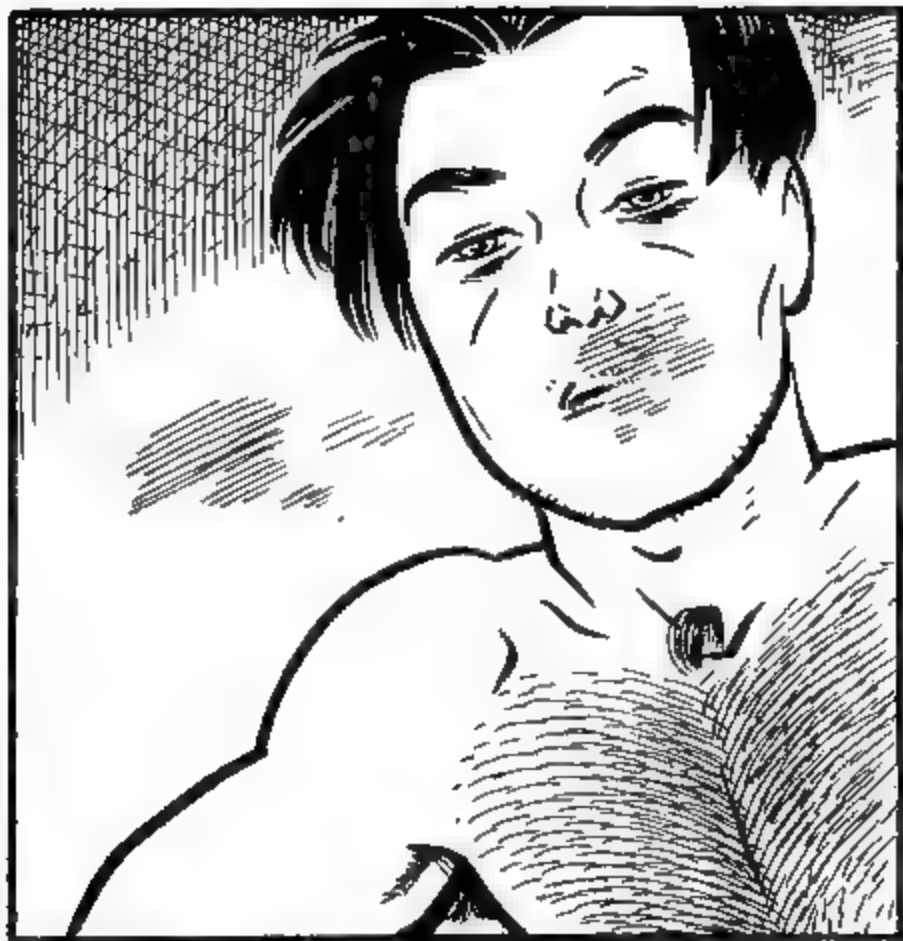
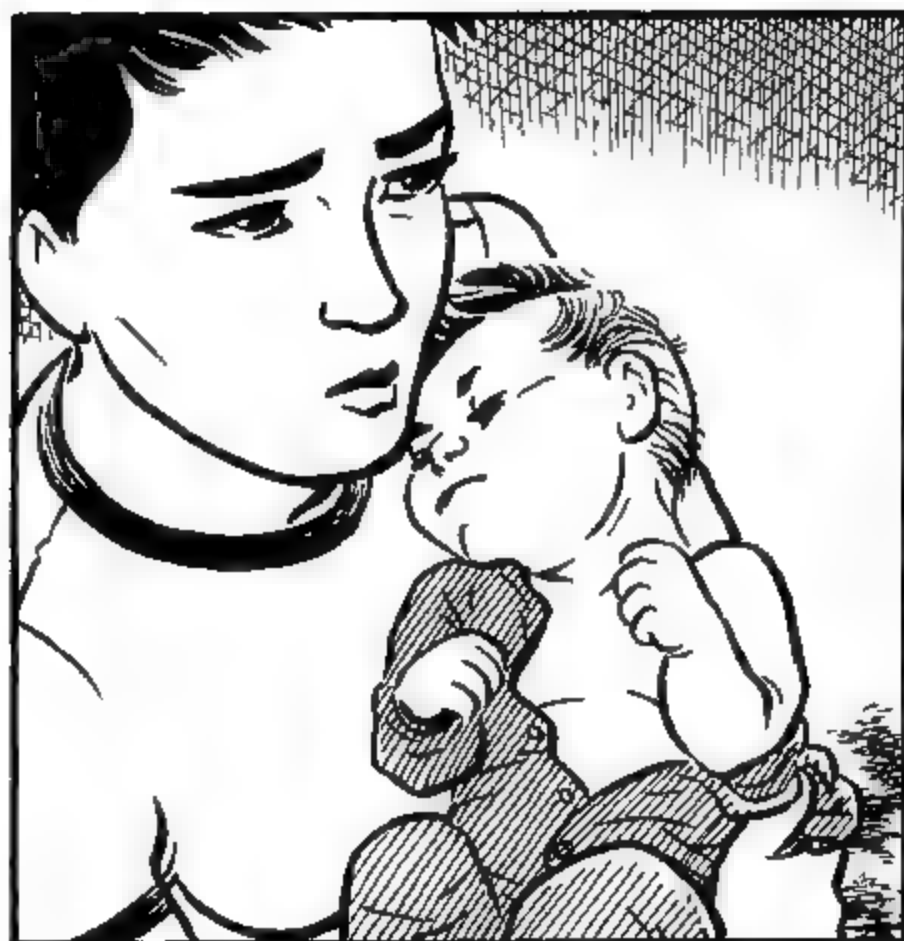


brief wake







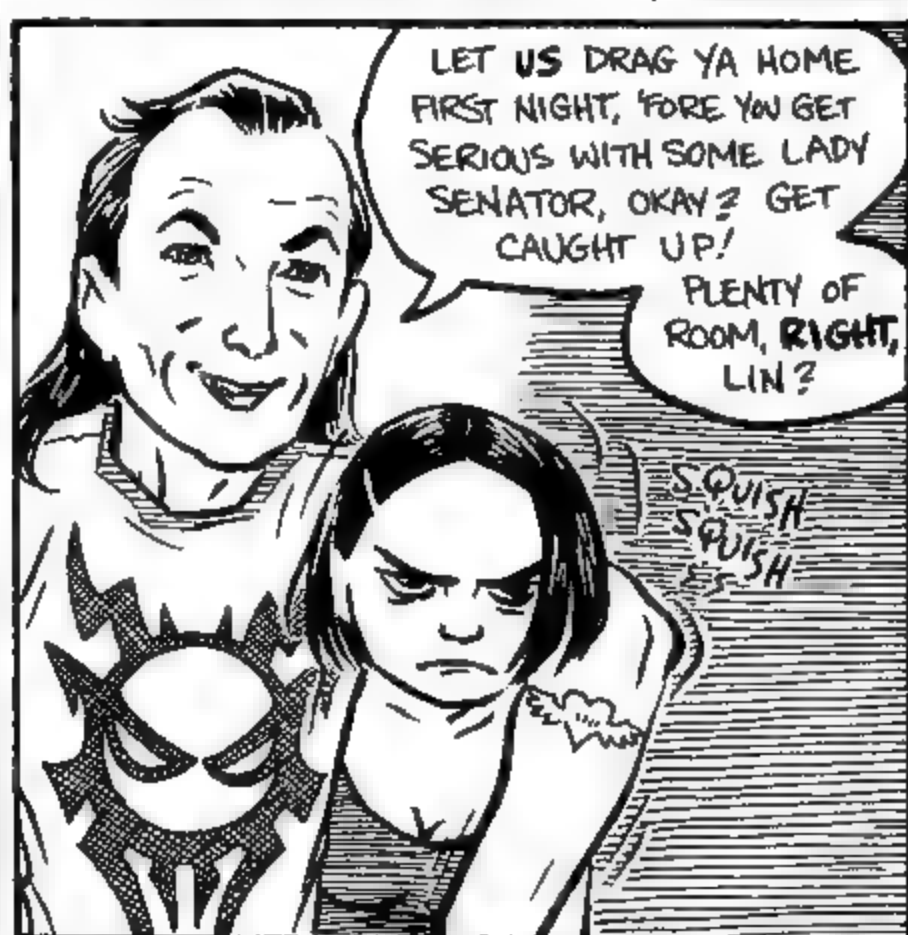
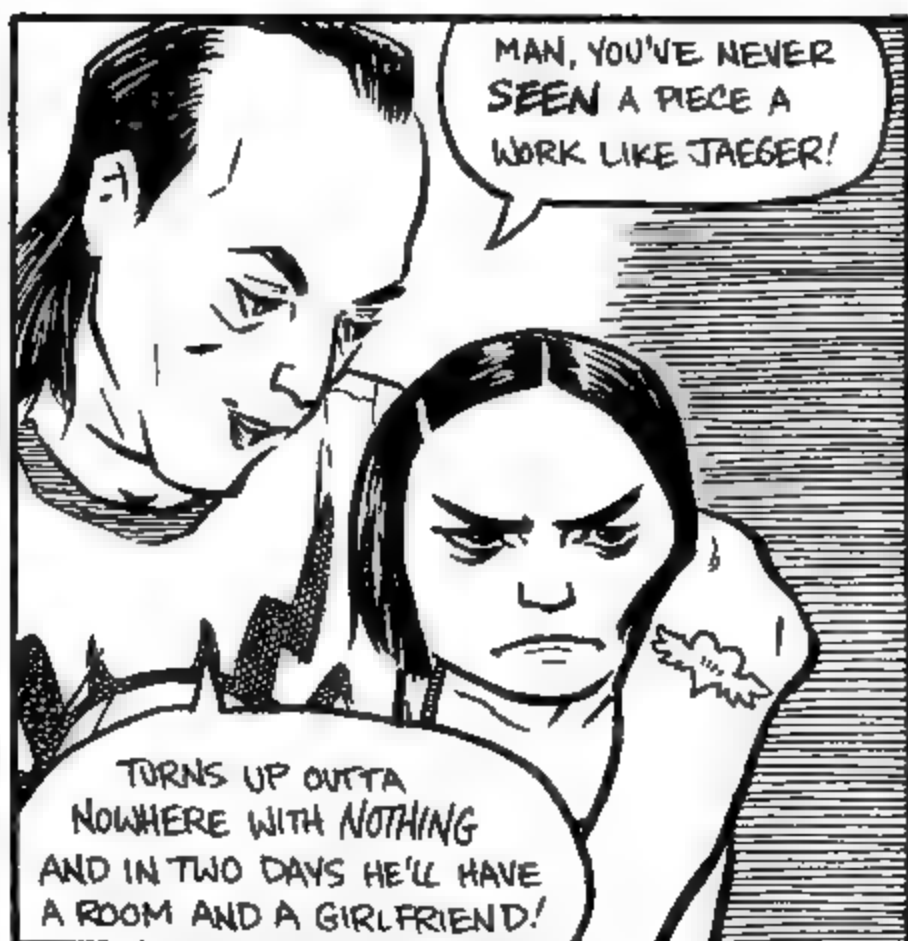


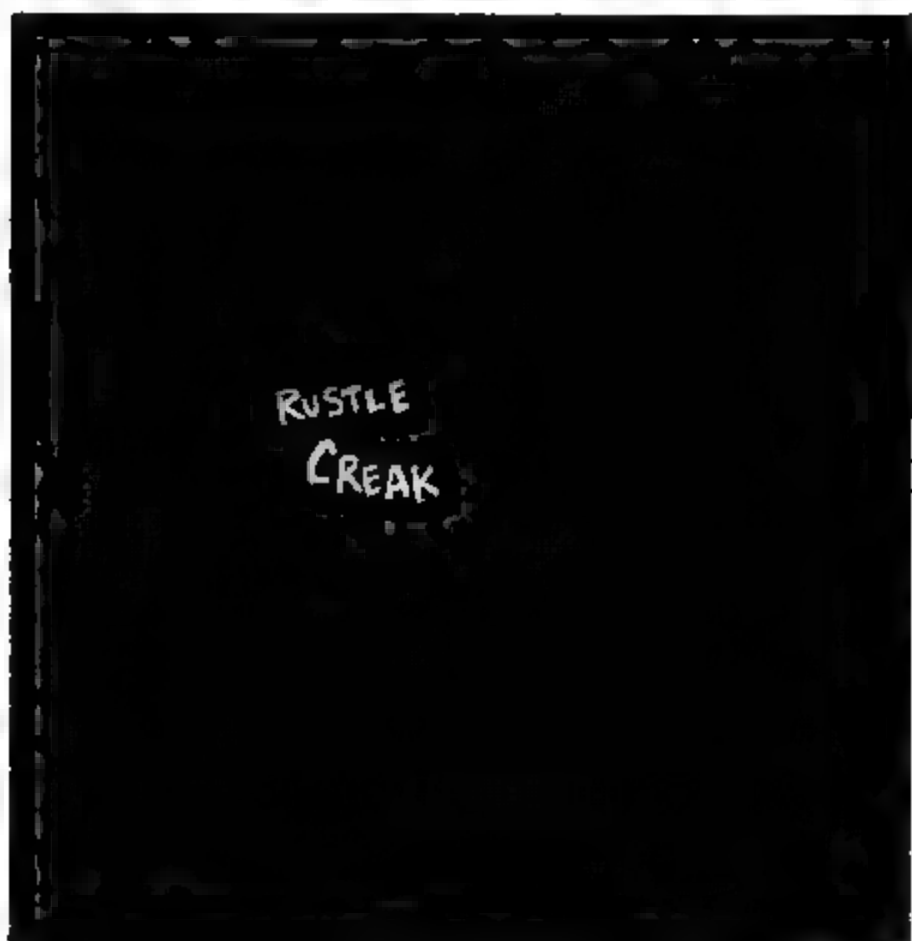
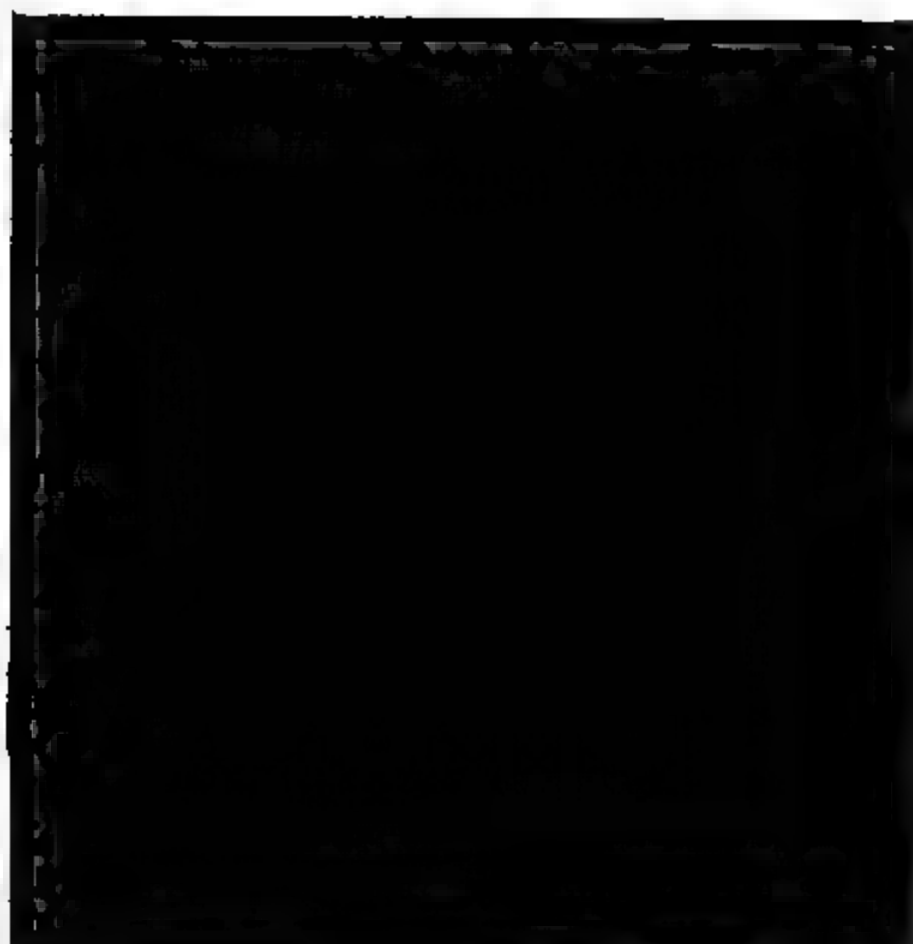


CHAPTER TWO:


So











CUH-RAZY
GIRL. ALL EAT
UP WITH THE
CRAZY.



WHAT, YOU?
AND A CRAZY
GIRL? NOOO.
NOOO, I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT.


SHIT, YOU'RE
A CRAZY MAGNET.
A CRAZY ELECTRO-
MAGNET. CRAZY GIRLS
FLY TO YOU AND
STICK.

AND YOU
LET 'EM.
WHY'S THAT,
D'YOU
THINK?



≡HEH≡

WELL...



Y'KNOW THEY ALL HAVE THEIR
MOMENTS. SOMETIMES IT'S MORE
LIKE MERE MOMENTS BEFORE
RABIES SETS IN, BUT ME, I
TRY TO TAKE THE INCUBATION
PERIOD FOR WHAT IT IS.

TAKE LINSEY,
FOR EXAMPLE;
SWEET KID,
MOSTLY.

SHE JUST WANTS
SOMEBODY TO EAT HER
COOKING AND TAKE HER
DANCING AND SAY, "POOR
BABY, HAVE A MARGARITA,"
WHEN SHE'S IN A SNIT
WITH A GIRLFRIEND.

VIC'S THE
OBLIVIOUS TYPE,
SO WHEN SHE
SULKS HE DOESN'T
TRIP HER BREAKER.


HELL, IF IT WOULDN'TA
MEANT GOING TEN ROUNDS
WITH VIC I'D A DONE WHAT
SHE WANTED. PROB'LY SHOULD
HAVE. VIC'S NOT **THAT**
TOUGH.

FIVE'LL GET YA TEN
SHE TOLD 'IM I DID
SLEEP WITH HER ANYWAY,
AND THEY'RE FIGHTING
FOR REAL NOW.

SO IF I'D DONE HER
AND TAKEN A FEW LUMPS
FROM HIM WOULD THEY BE
FIGHTING OR UNITED AGAINST
JAEGER THE DOUCHE BAG?

WHY IS IT WHEN
YOU DO THE NICE-GUY
THING, SEEMS LIKE
NOBODY GETS ANYTHING
THEY WANT?






"I WAS STILL HOUSE-HUNTING
AND EVERY TIME I TURNED
AROUND, THERE SHE WAS--"

"HALF THE NIGHT DANCING
AND SHE FLOPS OVER ME
AND SAYS--"

GAH! I LIKE THIS
SONG TOO **MUCH!** IT'S
BEEN ON IN EVERY PLACE
WE'VE **BEEN!** MY LEGS
CAN'T TAKE IT. LET'S
GO **HOME! NOW!**

LOUD
AND CLEAR,
RIGHT?

NO GUESS-
WORK **HERE,**
HUH?



SO WHAT THE HELL,
RIGHT? SHE'S A NICE,
SNUGGLY ARMFUL ALL
THE WAY BACK TO
HER PLACE.

EXACT
CHANGE
PLZ!

BUT THEN SHE
LETS US IN AND--
KA-BAM! SHE'S NOT
INTERESTED ANYMORE.

LIKE AN
ELECTRIC EYE
ACROSS THE
DOOR FRAME
WENT **CLICK**
AND TURNED
HER **OFF!**

I THOUGHT
I'D BEEN UP-
FRONT WITH HER
-- I'D TOLD HER
I NEEDED A
BED, RIGHT?

SHE WAS OKAY WITH
THAT-- SO I MUSTA LOOKED
GOOD AND STUPID WHEN I
REALIZED SHE MEANT ME
TO SLEEP ON HER **COUCH.**

ALONE,
THAT IS.

SO?

WHAT THE **HELL.**
I'M **BEAT.** GET SOME
SLEEP, MAKE HER
BREAKFAST IF SHE'LL
LET ME, GO MY WAY.
NO HARM, NO FOUL.

BREAKFAST?
UNGH...

LET ME
BE CLEAR.

I LIKE LIVING OUT
IN THE BARRENS. I LIKE
HUNTING AND FISHING AND
DIGGING AROUND IN THE
GHOST TOWNS.

"I LIKE THE HIGH
HILLS AND THE WIND.
I CAN TAKE CARE OF
MYSELF OUT THERE
JUST FINE.

"BUT THERE
ARE...

"CERTAIN
THINGS...

"I
MISS."

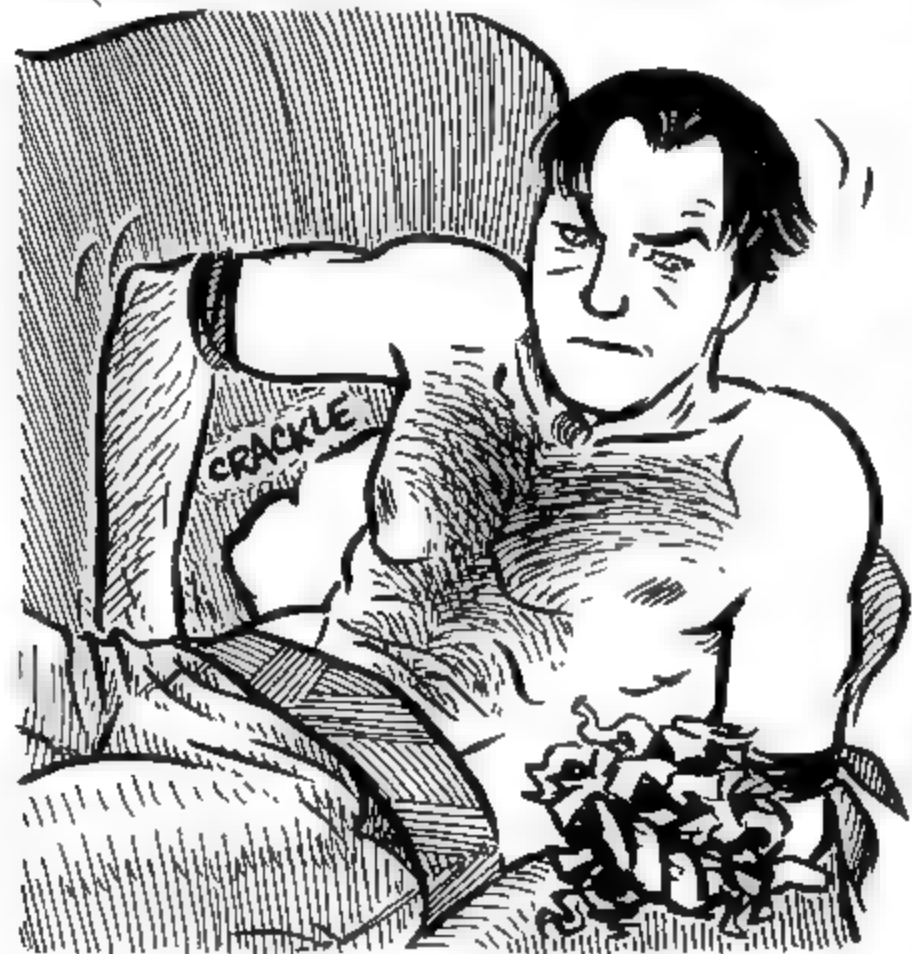
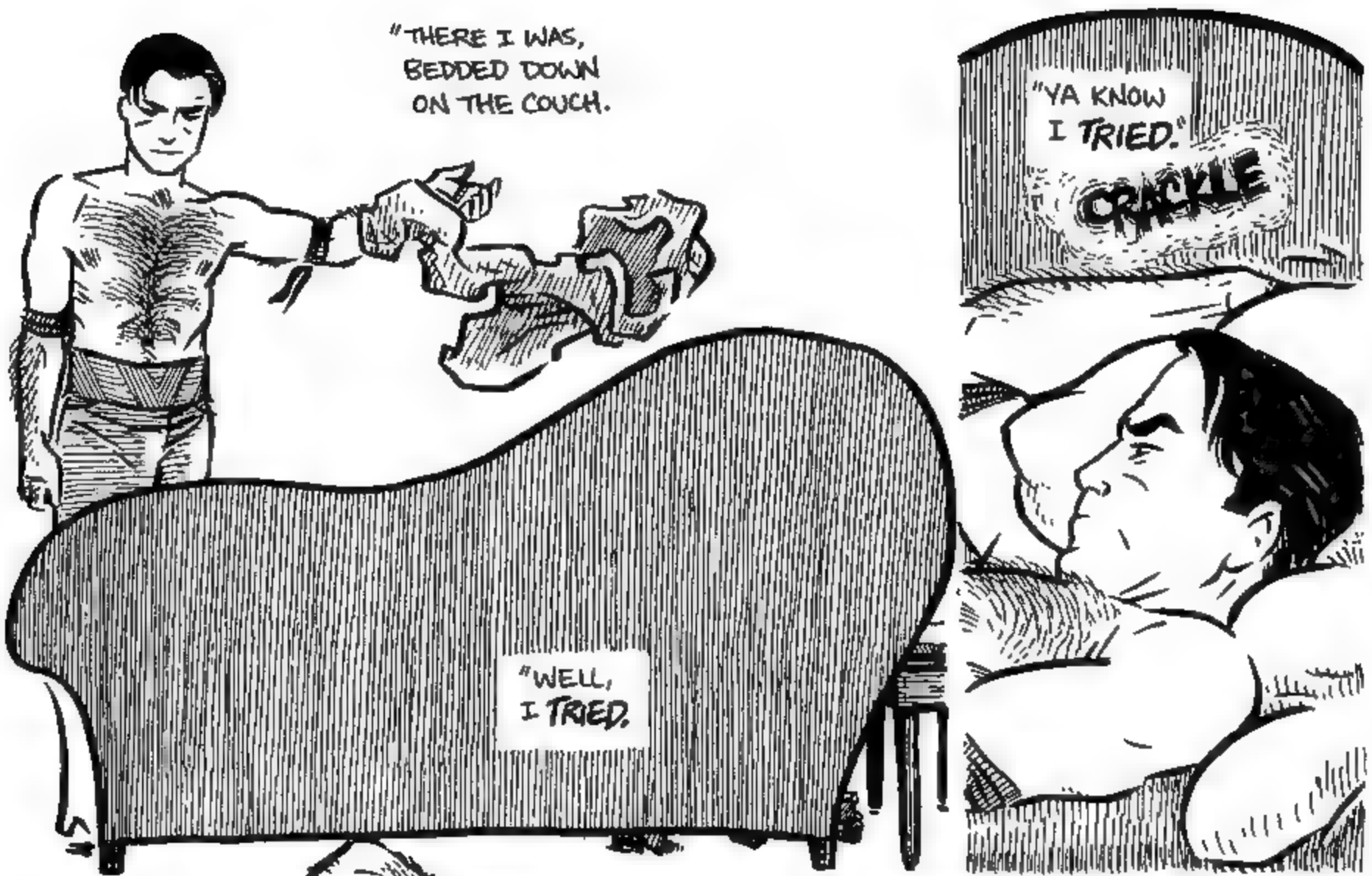
BUTTER

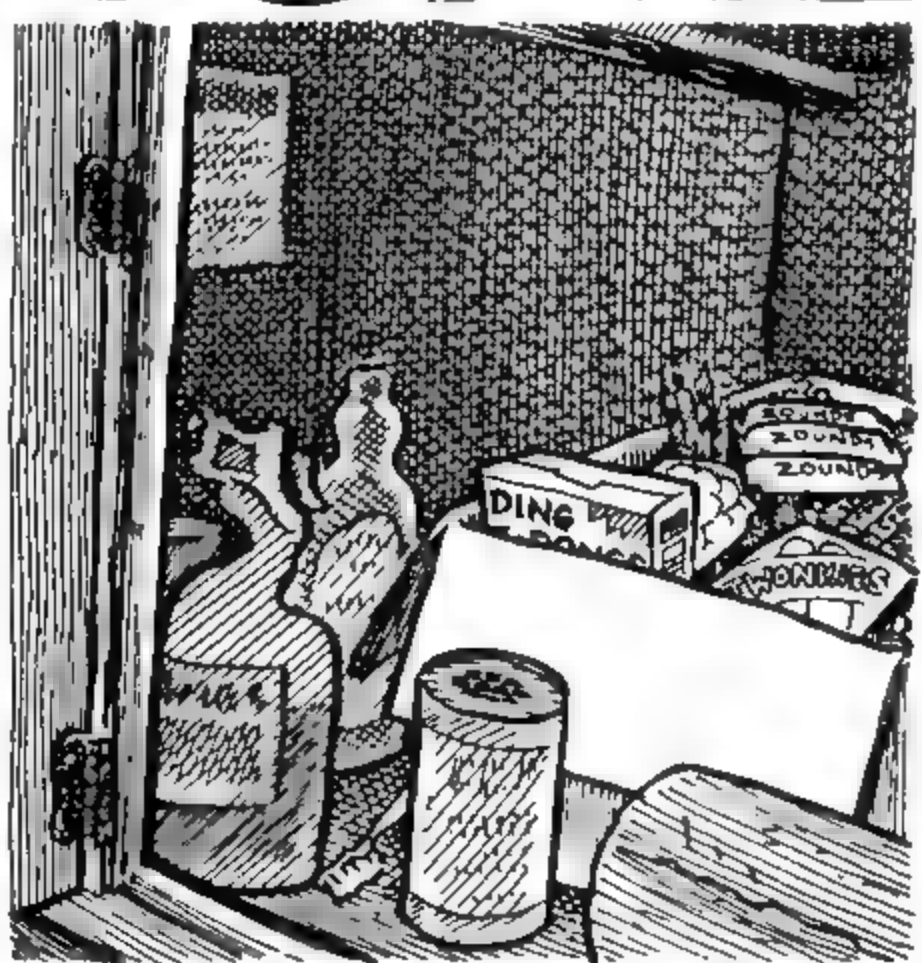
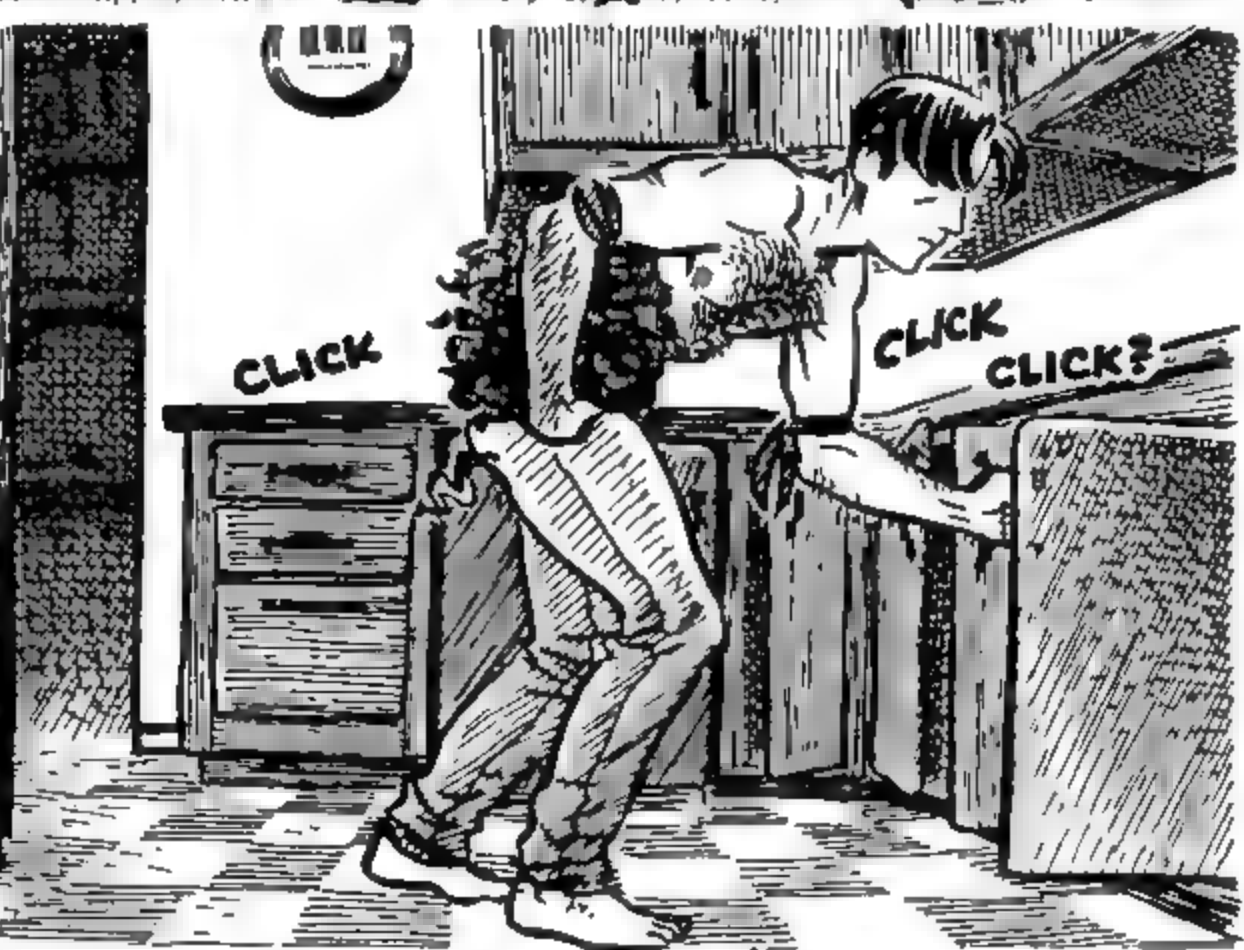
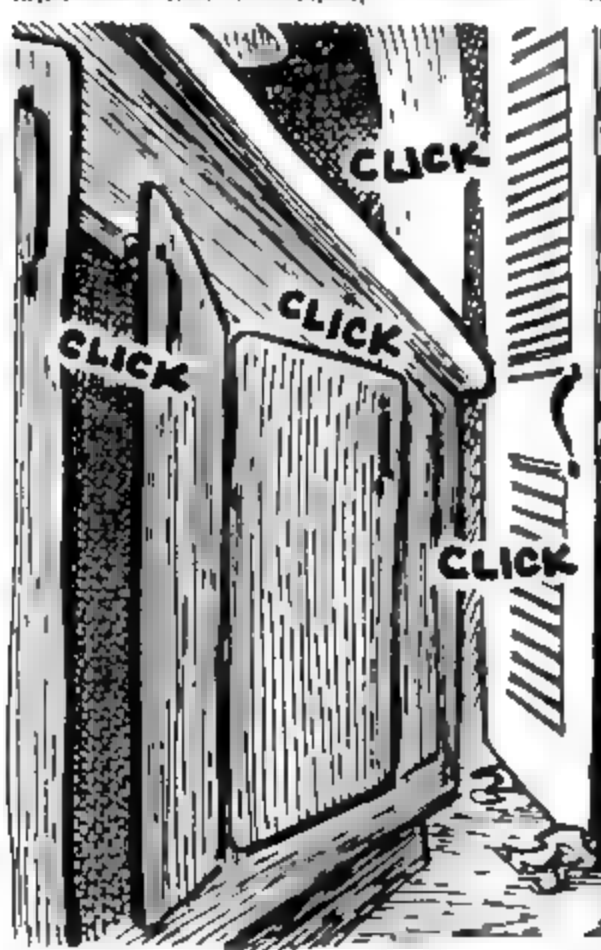
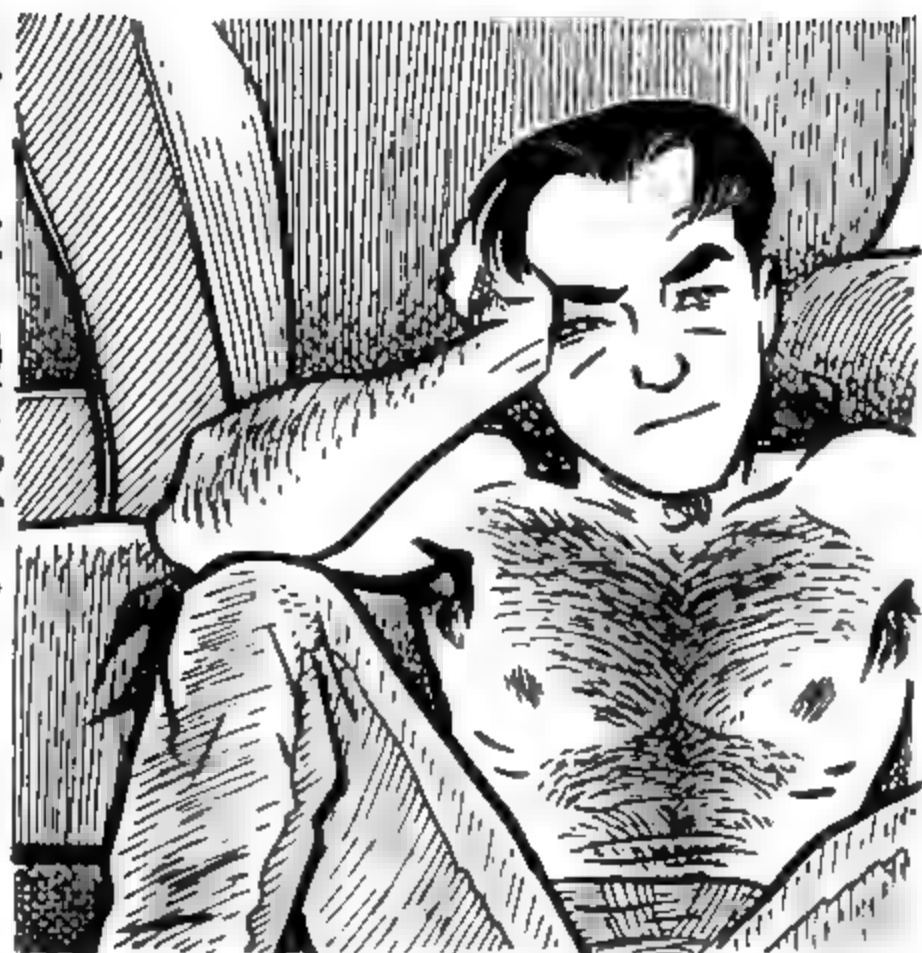
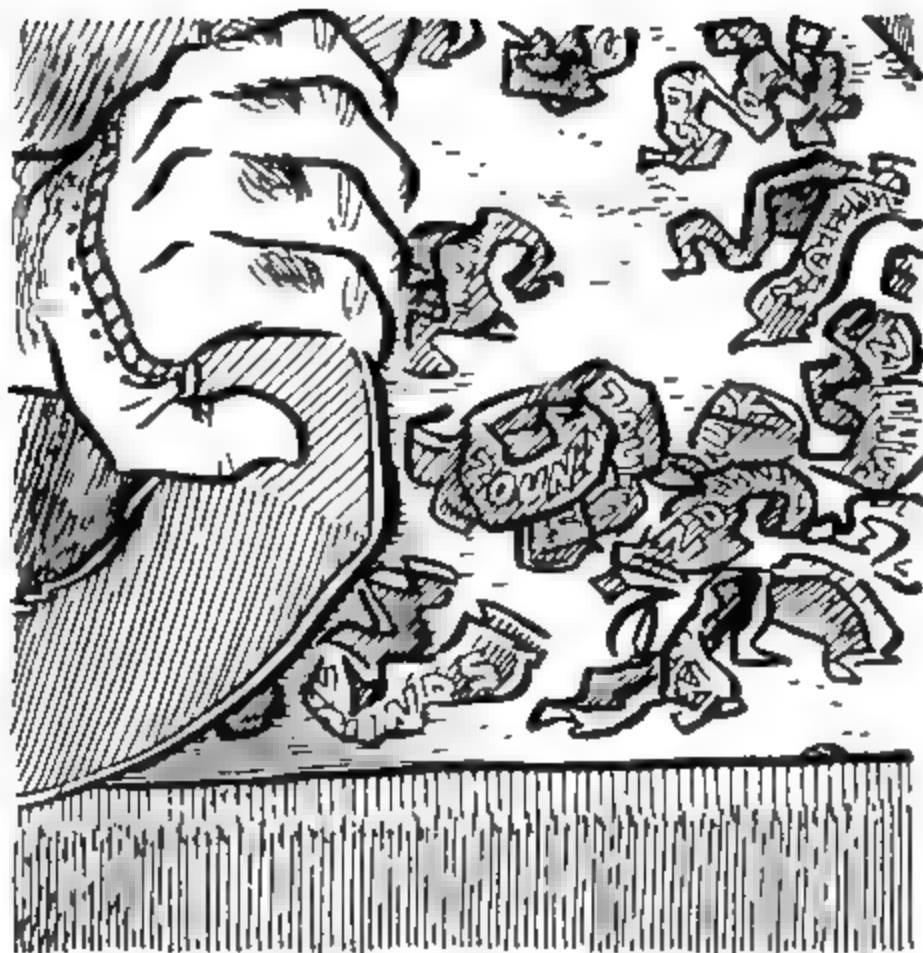
FLOUR

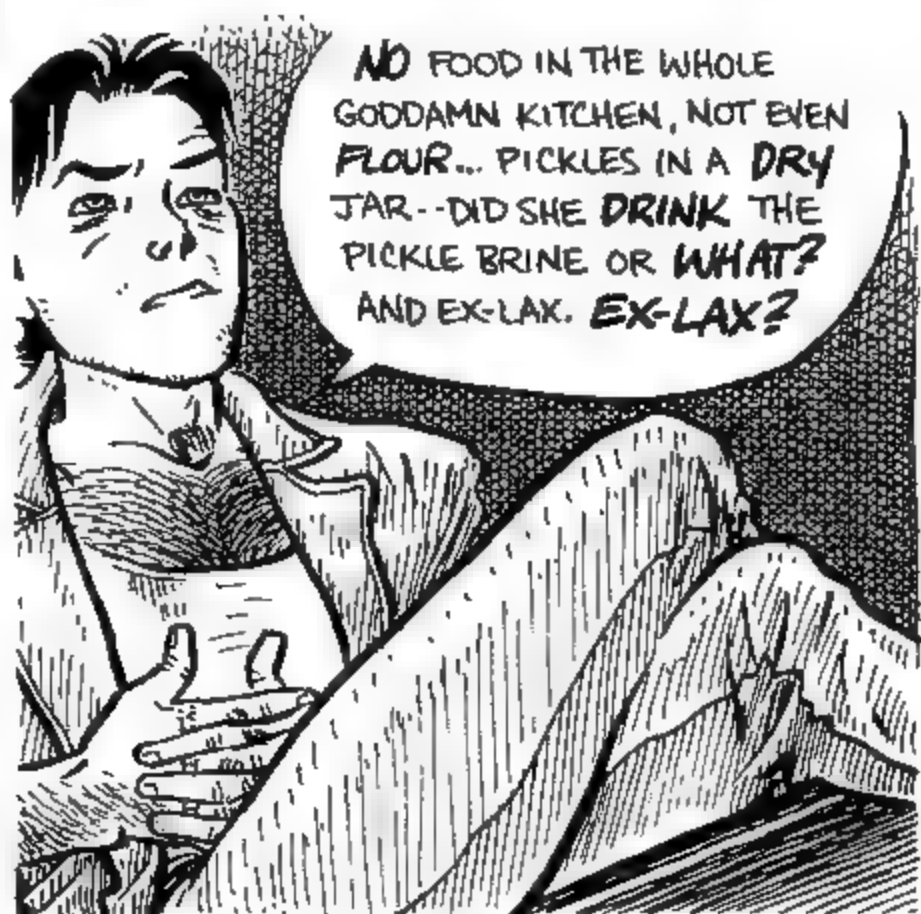
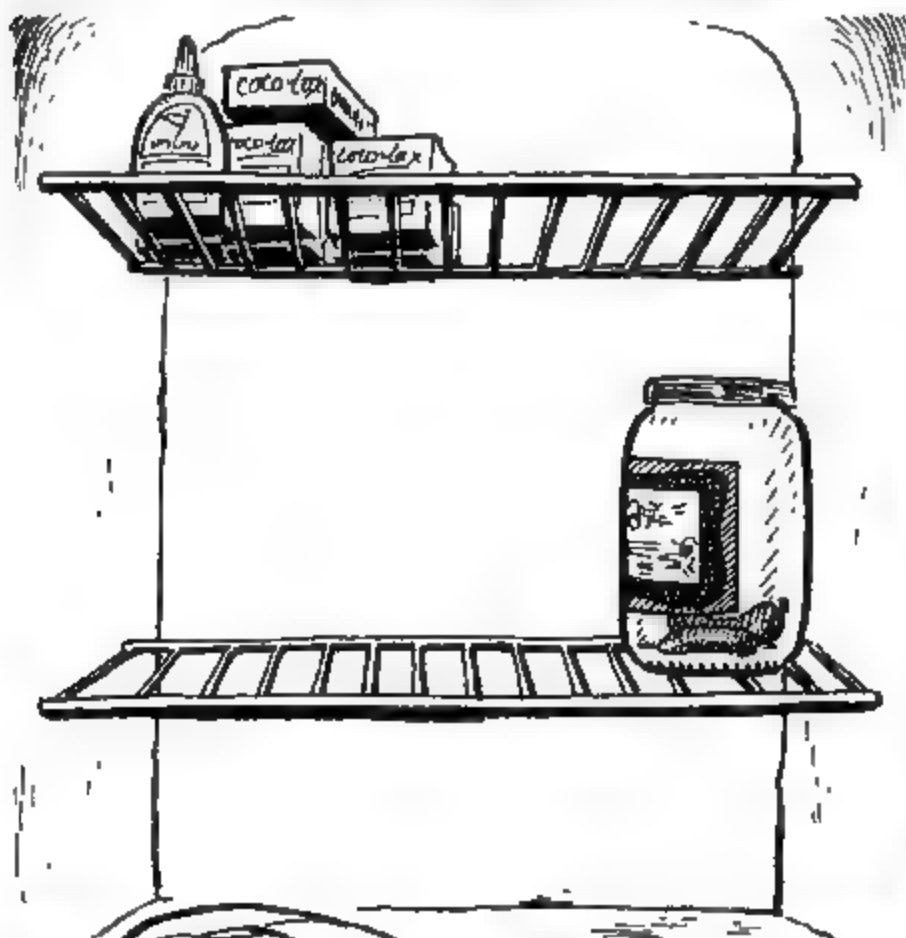
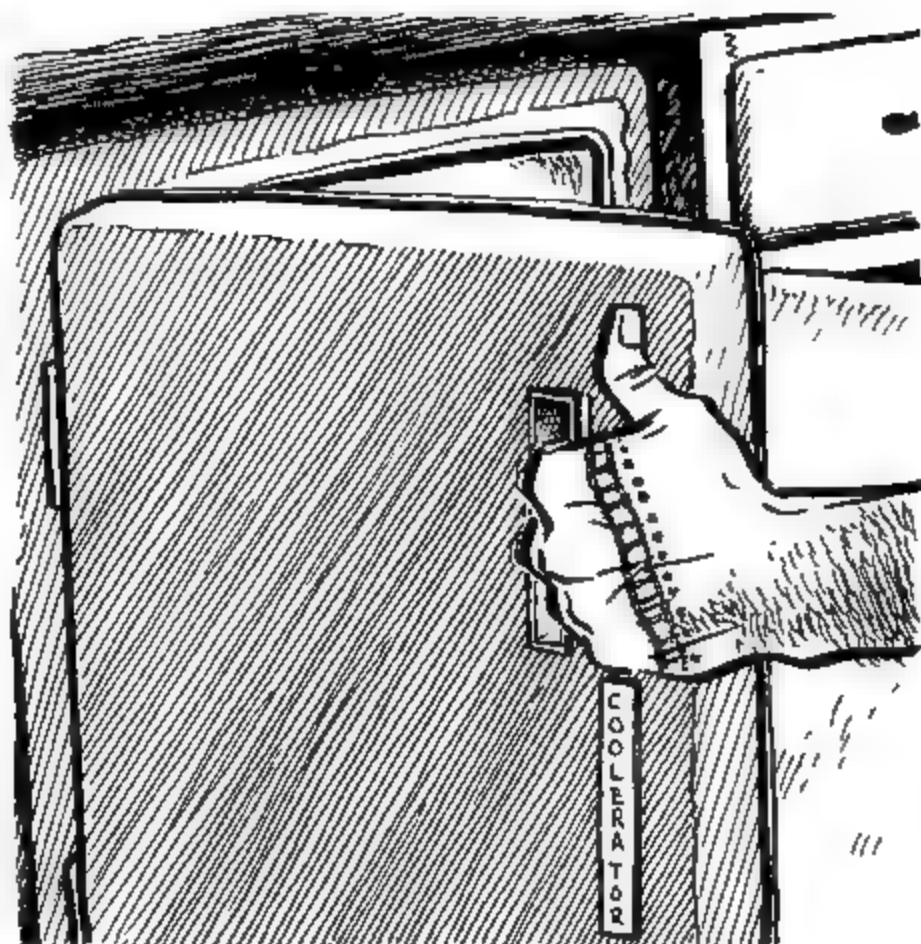
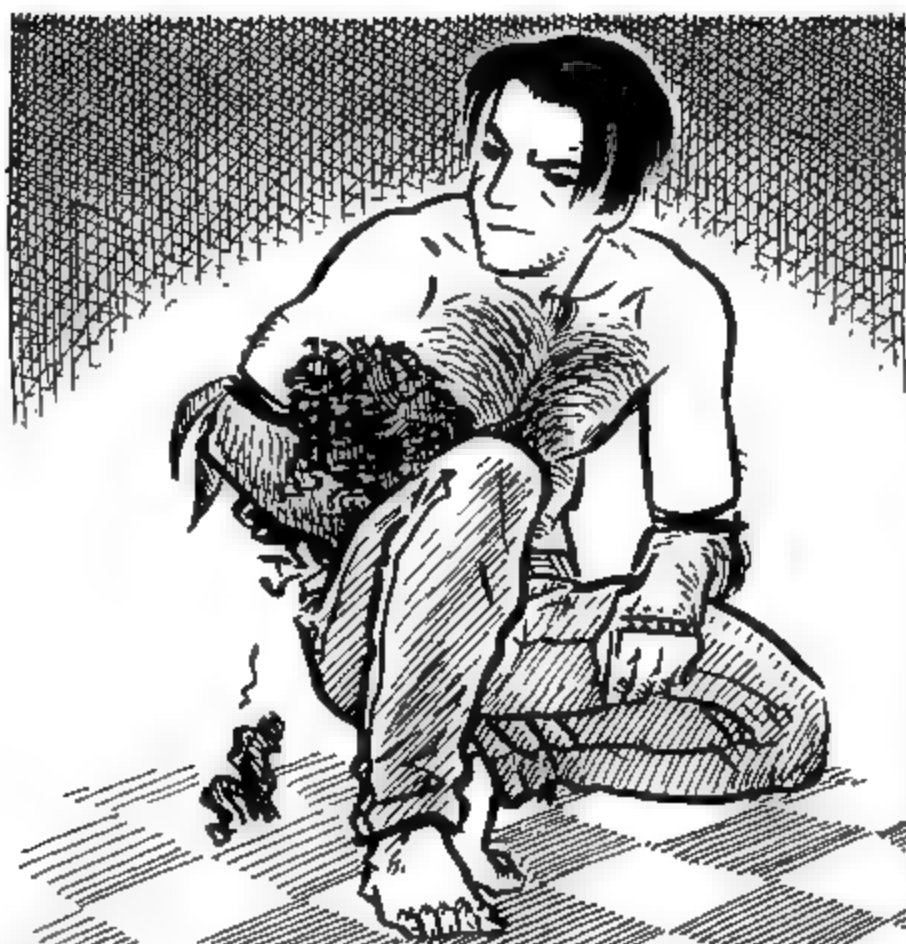
SUGAR













GARBAGE CAN?



OH.

YEAH...



I AM SO SORRY, I AM SUCH A SLOB--



--I KNOW WHAT YOU MUST BE THINKING--

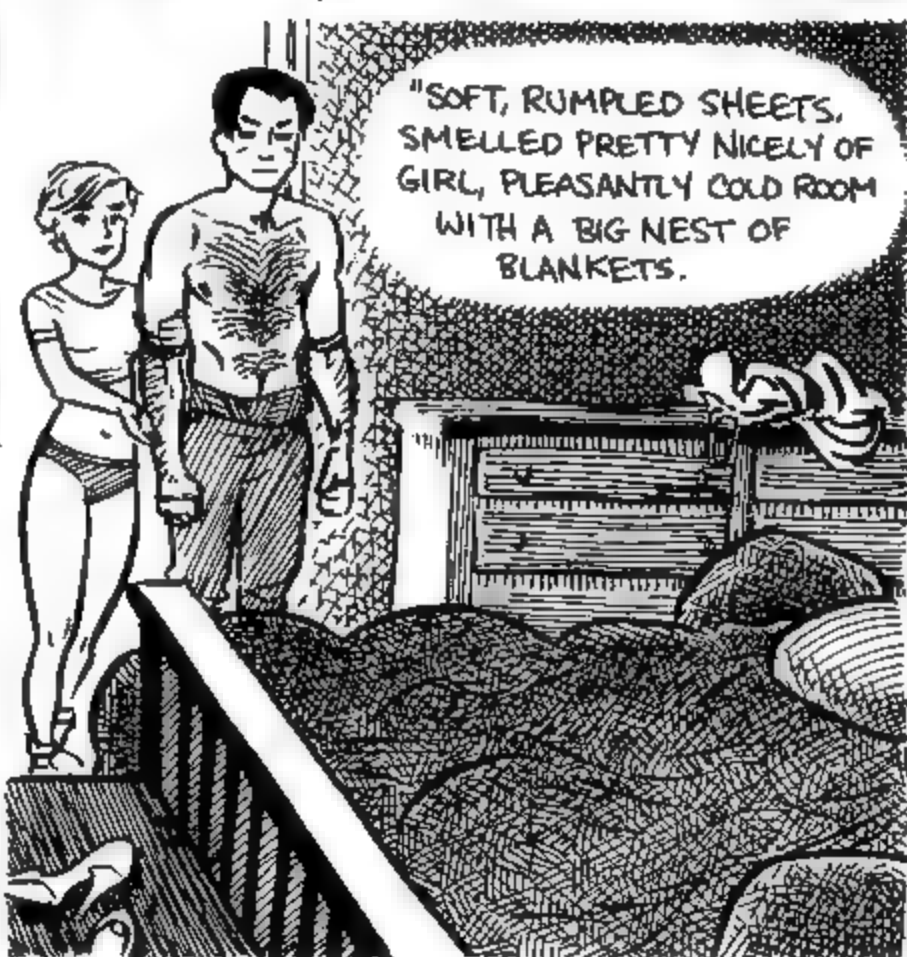


-- BUT REALLY, THIS PLACE IS CLEAN ENOUGH IF YOU JUST DON'T RUMMAGE AROUND--



YEAH, YOU KNOW, YOU ARE SO RIGHT; WHY DON'T I GO.

GO?

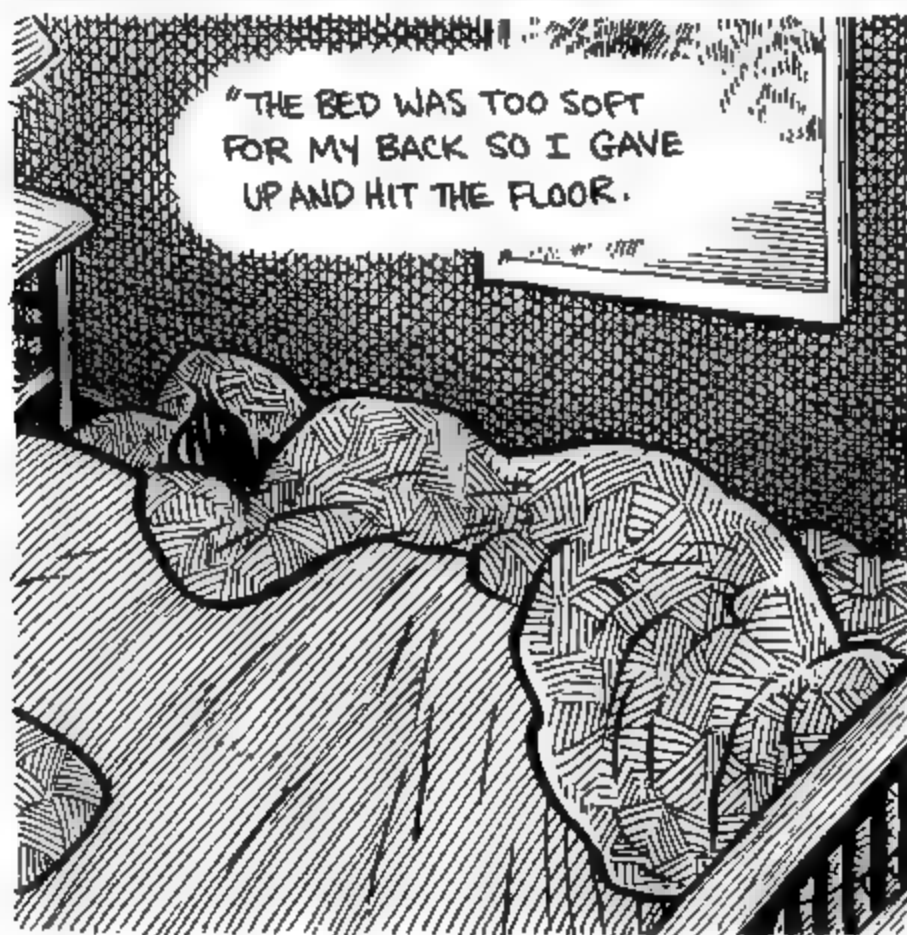




"I CURLED UP
IN HER BED
AND WAITED
LONG ENOUGH
TO DROOP."



CAN'T NOBODY
SAY I'M NOT
PATIENT--



"THE BED WAS TOO SOFT
FOR MY BACK SO I GAVE
UP AND HIT THE FLOOR."

"I SLEPT HARD FOR
ABOUT FOUR HOURS
--THAT'S A LOT
FOR ME, I'M A
CATNAPPER--



"AND WHEN I
GOT UP THERE
WERE THREE
BIG THINGS."



"HER.
ASLEEP."

WEDGED
BEHIND
THE JAKES.



"IN THE
KITCHEN.
AN ENTIRELY
NEW CAKE."



AND MY
MONKEY ASS.
OUT THE
DOOR.

AWW. ALL
WITHOUT
BREAKFAST?

OH **HELL** NO.
YOU THINK
I'M LEAVING A
PERFECTLY GOOD
CAKE FOR SOME
CRAZY GIRL?

CHAPTER THREE:

OH NO,
SHE'S
EXACTLY
THE TYPE
I'D GO
AFTER.

I MEAN
THE WAY SHE
WAS **BEFORE**
SHE WENT ALL
BATSHIT
ON ME!

WELL **HELL**,
NONE OF 'EM
LOOK CRAZY
WHEN I MEET
THEM!

JUMPIN'
JESUS ON A
POGO STICK!



TALLY HO



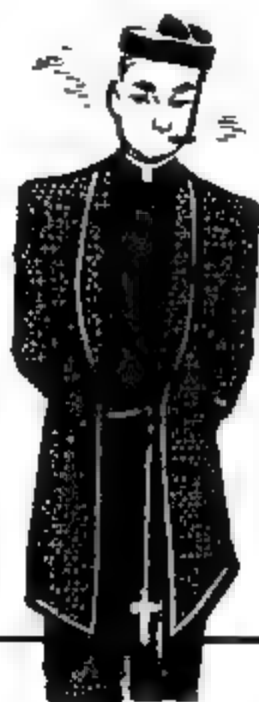




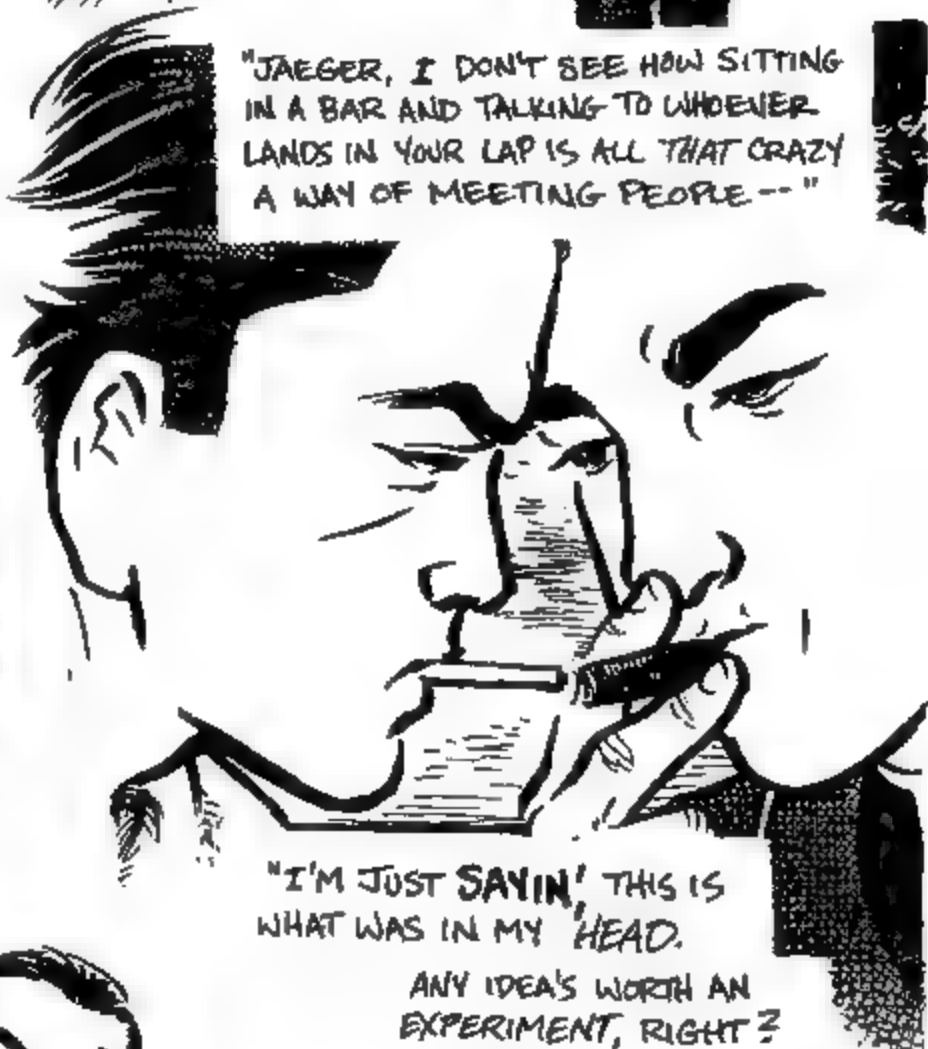
"CAN'T SAY
IT DIDN'T
GET ME
THINKING."



"AM I A LOWLIFE? GOD KNOWS, I'M
MAKING A LIVING HERE DOING
SOME LOWLIFE SHIT--"



"-- SO IF I'M GOING ABOUT MEETING WOMEN
AS PART OF A FUNDAMENTALLY BROKEN LIFE,
IS THAT WHY ALL THE ONES I'M MEETING ARE
SO SHOT-IN-THE-HEAD?"



"JAEGER, I DON'T SEE HOW SITTING
IN A BAR AND TALKING TO WHOEVER
LANDS IN YOUR LAP IS ALL THAT CRAZY
A WAY OF MEETING PEOPLE --"

"I'M JUST SAYIN' THIS IS
WHAT WAS IN MY HEAD.
ANY IDEA'S WORTH AN
EXPERIMENT, RIGHT?"



"HERE'S THE
THING, THOUGH--"

HURRI-DATE.

"HOW THE HELL DO
NONLOWLIFES
MEET EACH OTHER?"



SO YOU
WENT TO A
MEET
MARKET.



YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO MAKE AN
IMPRESSION AND WE'VE GOT TO WIN YOUR
IMPRESSION DON'T WE? DON'T
YOUR HEART AND
INTO IT JUST MAKE
OF WHICH ONES YOU
TO TALK TO AGAIN.
CHECKS AND
DON'T BE O
WITH THE
HATE TH
YOUR
ON V
BLO
BO
LAT
WH
IS A
ABC
OKAY

YOUR
FOUR
SOUL
A NOTE
YOU'D LIKE
JUST USE
EXES BUT
STENTATIOUS
EXES THEY
AT HERE'S
UMBER MOVE
HEN THE HORN
S LEAVE THE
JOING FOR
ER THAT'S
AT THIS



WELL, AH...
TWENTY-FIVE
WOMEN IN TWO
HOURS?

IT'S A CHALLENGE,
GOTTA ADMIT, THAT
NOT EVERYBODY CAN
RISE TO MEET..



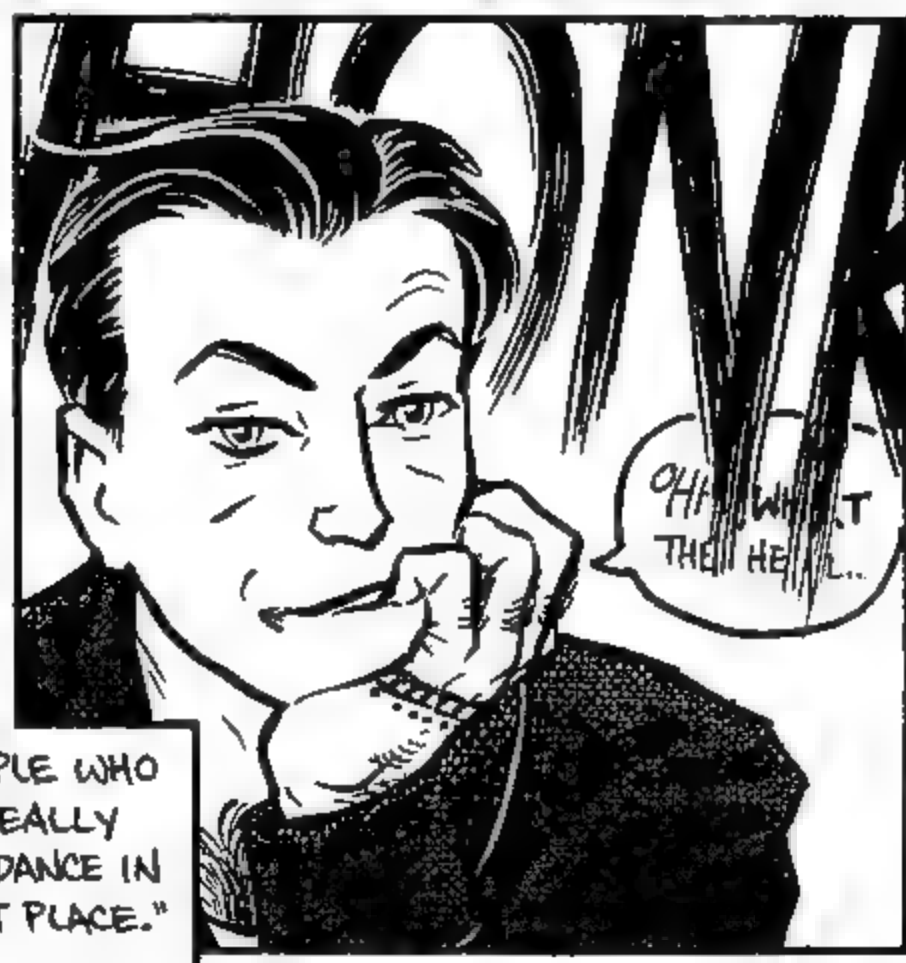
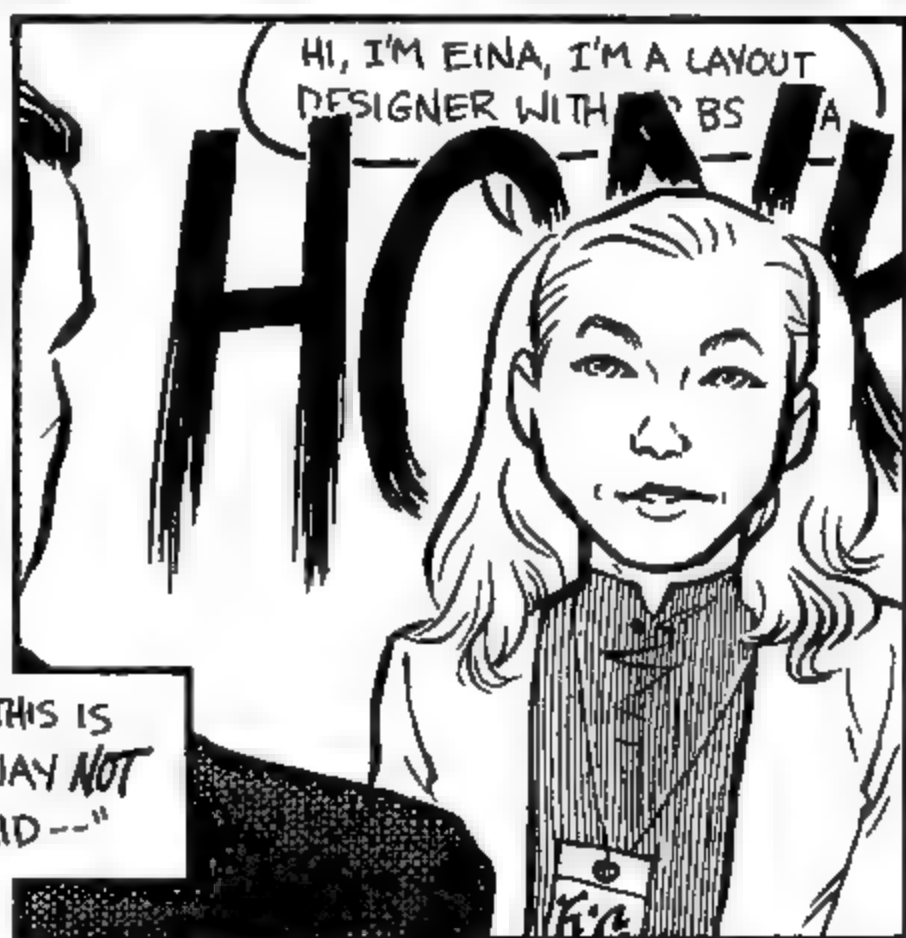
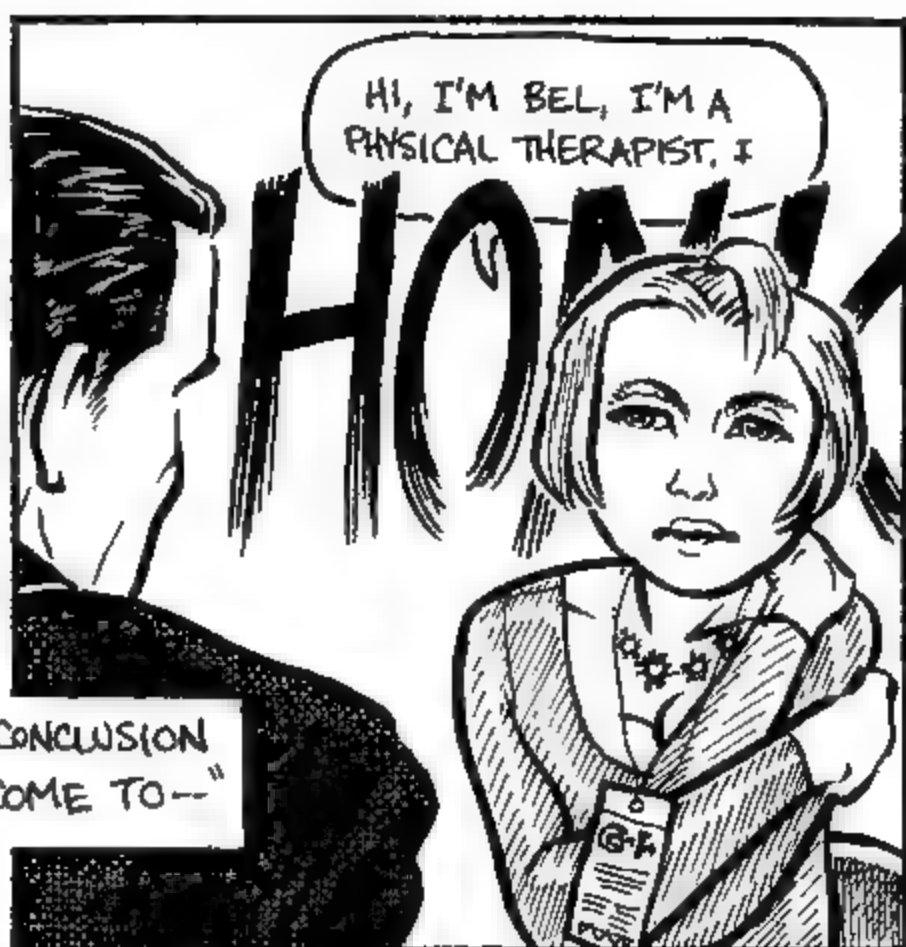
"FIVE MINUTES TO MAKE AN
IMPRESSION. AND NO ALCOHOL.

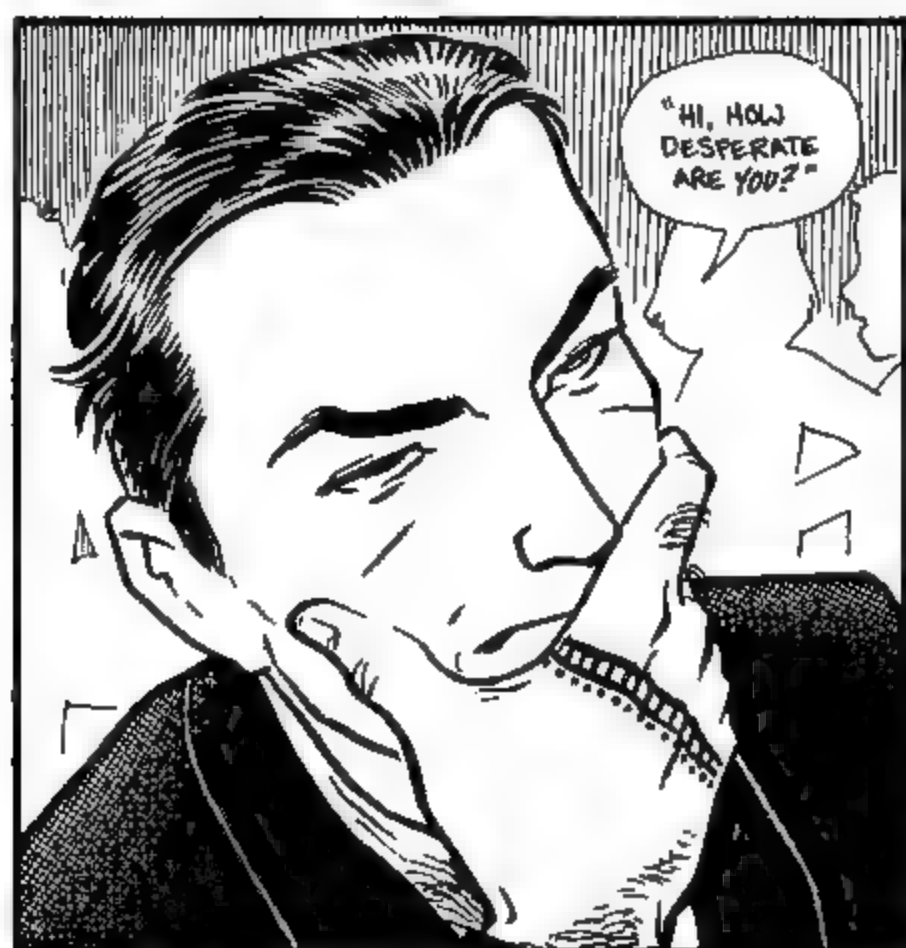
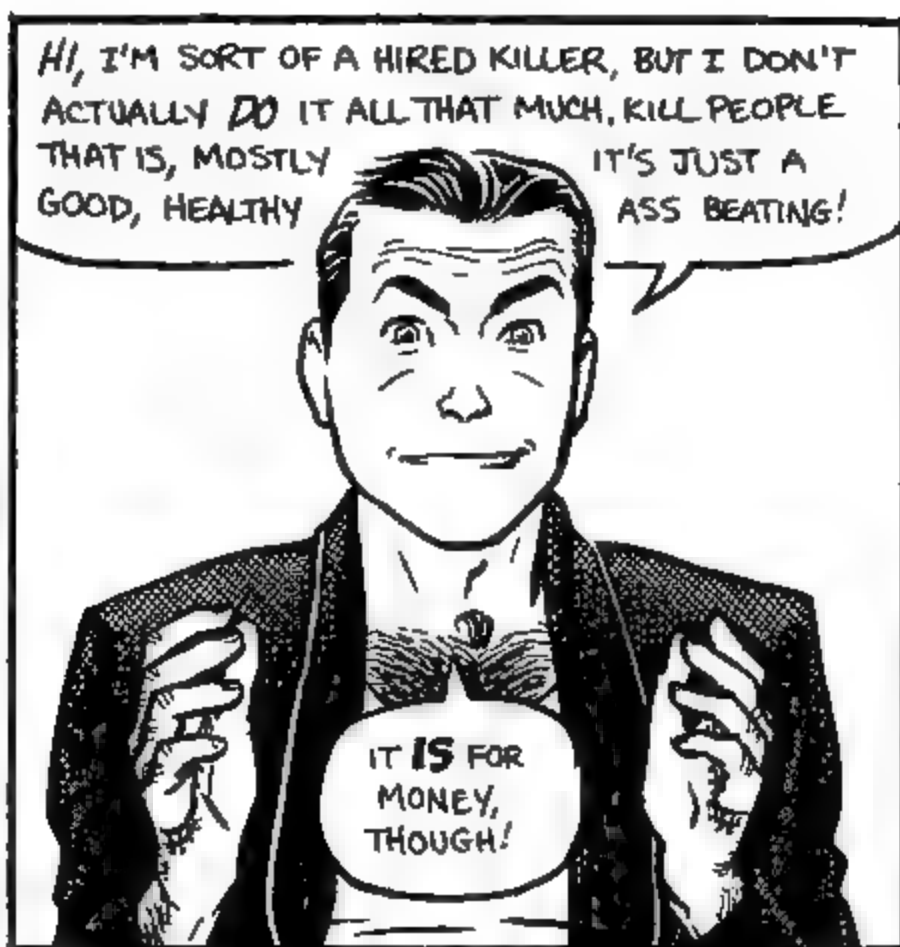
OKAY.

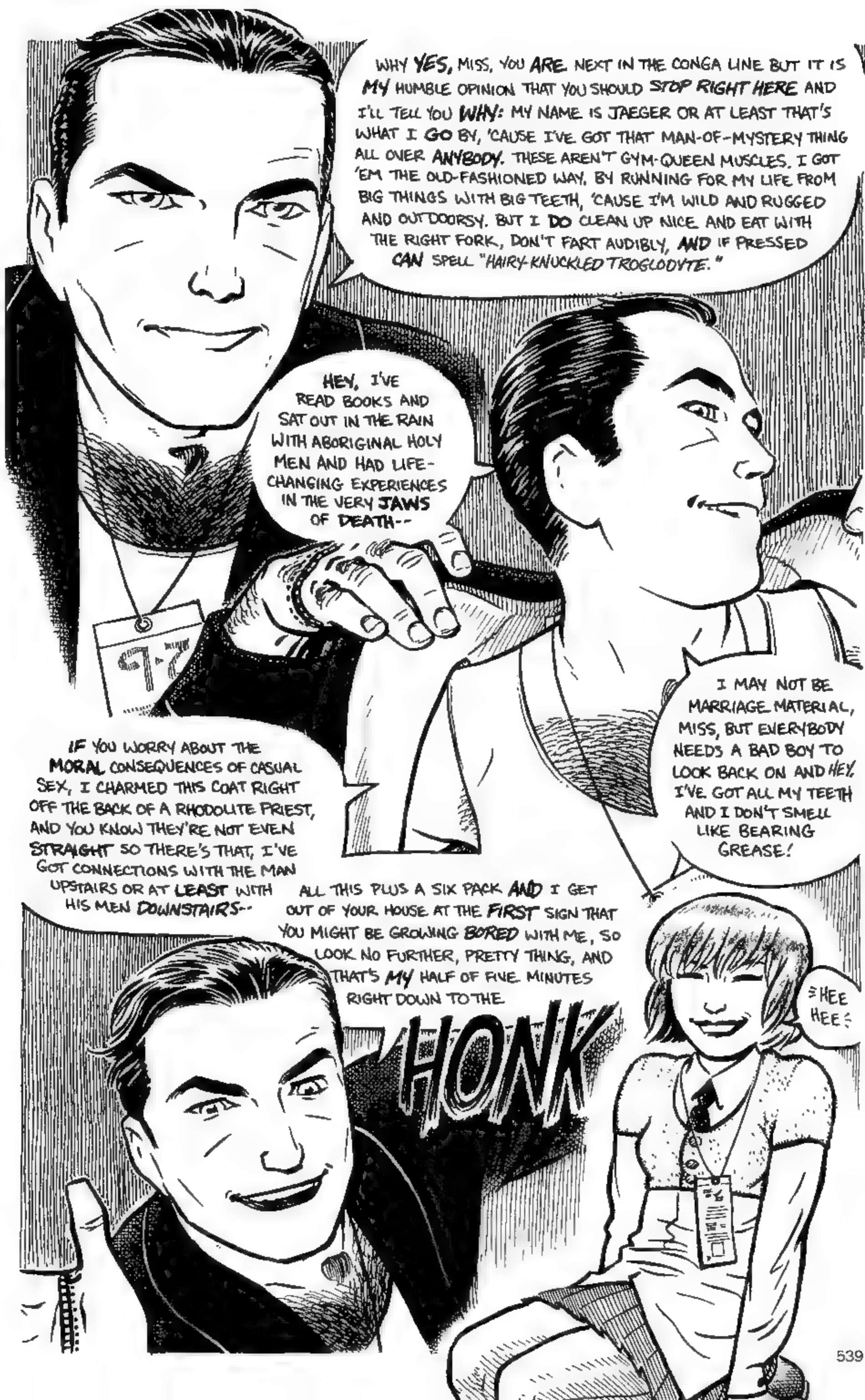
WHAT
THE HELL,
RI--"



OKAY, NOW--
HURRI-DATE!







WHY YES, MISS, YOU ARE NEXT IN THE CONGA LINE BUT IT IS MY HUMBLE OPINION THAT YOU SHOULD STOP RIGHT HERE AND I'LL TELL YOU WHY: MY NAME IS JAEGER OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I GO BY, 'CAUSE I'VE GOT THAT MAN-OF-MYSTERY THING ALL OVER ANYBODY. THESE AREN'T GYM-QUEEN MUSCLES, I GOT 'EM THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY, BY RUNNING FOR MY LIFE FROM BIG THINGS WITH BIG TEETH, 'CAUSE I'M WILD AND RUGGED AND OUTDOORSY. BUT I DO CLEAN UP NICE AND EAT WITH THE RIGHT FORK, DON'T FART AUDIBLY, AND IF PRESSED CAN SPELL "HAIRY-KNUCKLED TROGLODYTE."

HEY, I'VE READ BOOKS AND SAT OUT IN THE RAIN WITH ABORIGINAL HOLY MEN AND HAD LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES IN THE VERY JAWS OF DEATH--

IF YOU WORRY ABOUT THE MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF CASUAL SEX, I CHARMED THIS COAT RIGHT OFF THE BACK OF A RHODOLITE PRIEST, AND YOU KNOW THEY'RE NOT EVEN STRAIGHT SO THERE'S THAT, I'VE GOT CONNECTIONS WITH THE MAN UPSTAIRS OR AT LEAST WITH HIS MEN DOWNSTAIRS--

ALL THIS PLUS A SIX PACK AND I GET OUT OF YOUR HOUSE AT THE FIRST SIGN THAT YOU MIGHT BE GROWING BORED WITH ME, SO LOOK NO FURTHER, PRETTY THING, AND THAT'S MY HALF OF FIVE MINUTES RIGHT DOWN TO THE

HONK

I MAY NOT BE MARRIAGE MATERIAL, MISS, BUT EVERYBODY NEEDS A BAD BOY TO LOOK BACK ON AND HEY, I'VE GOT ALL MY TEETH AND I DON'T SMELL LIKE BEARING GREASE!

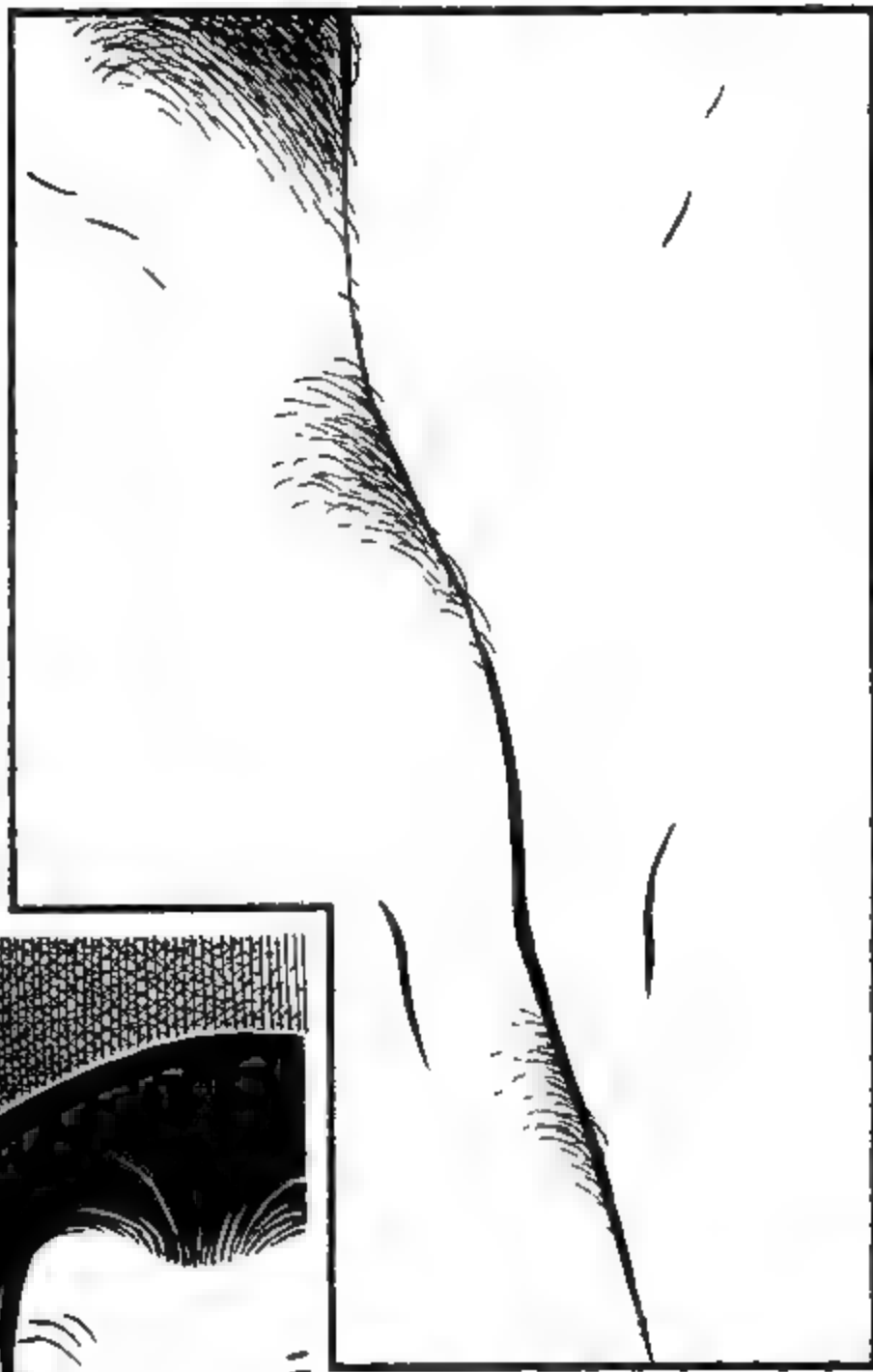
HEE
HEE

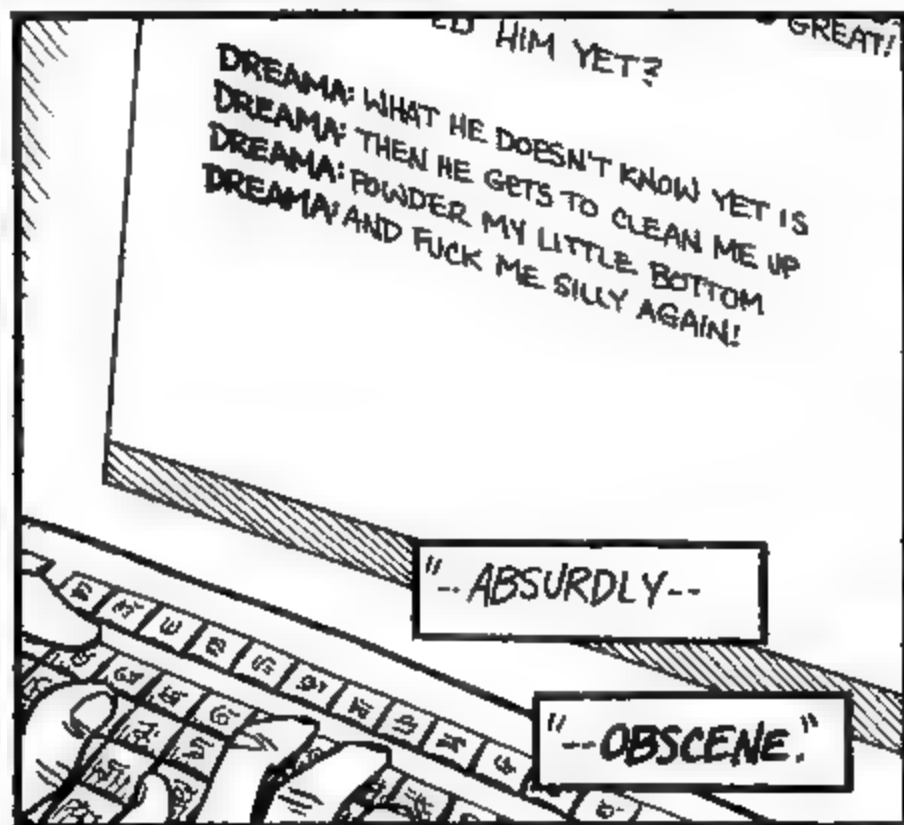
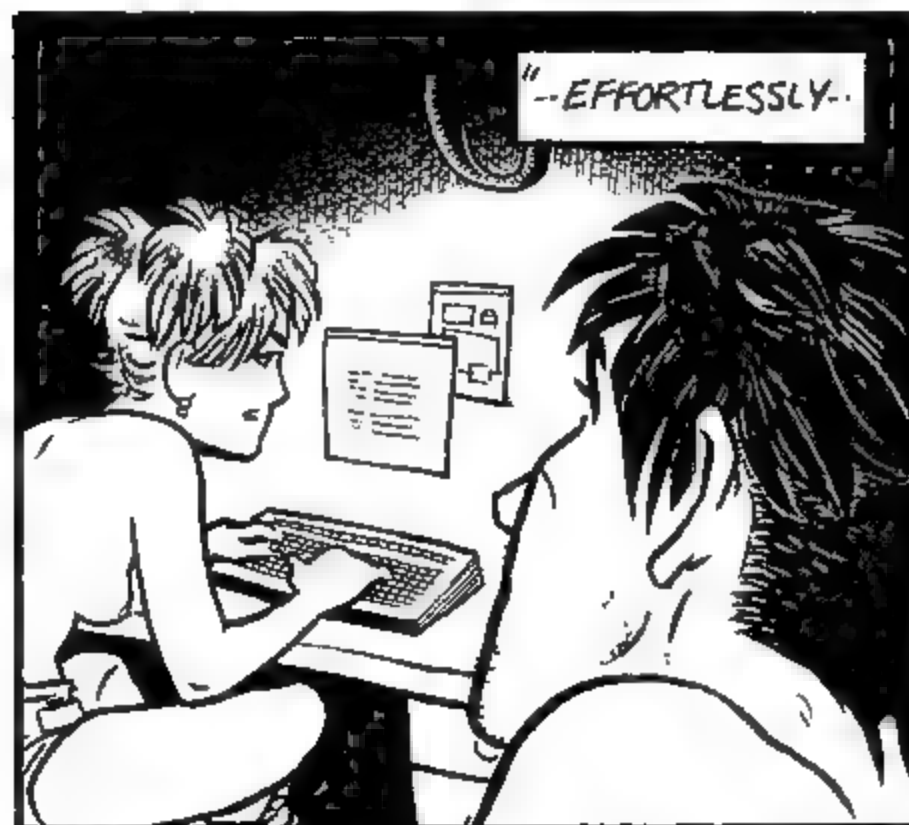
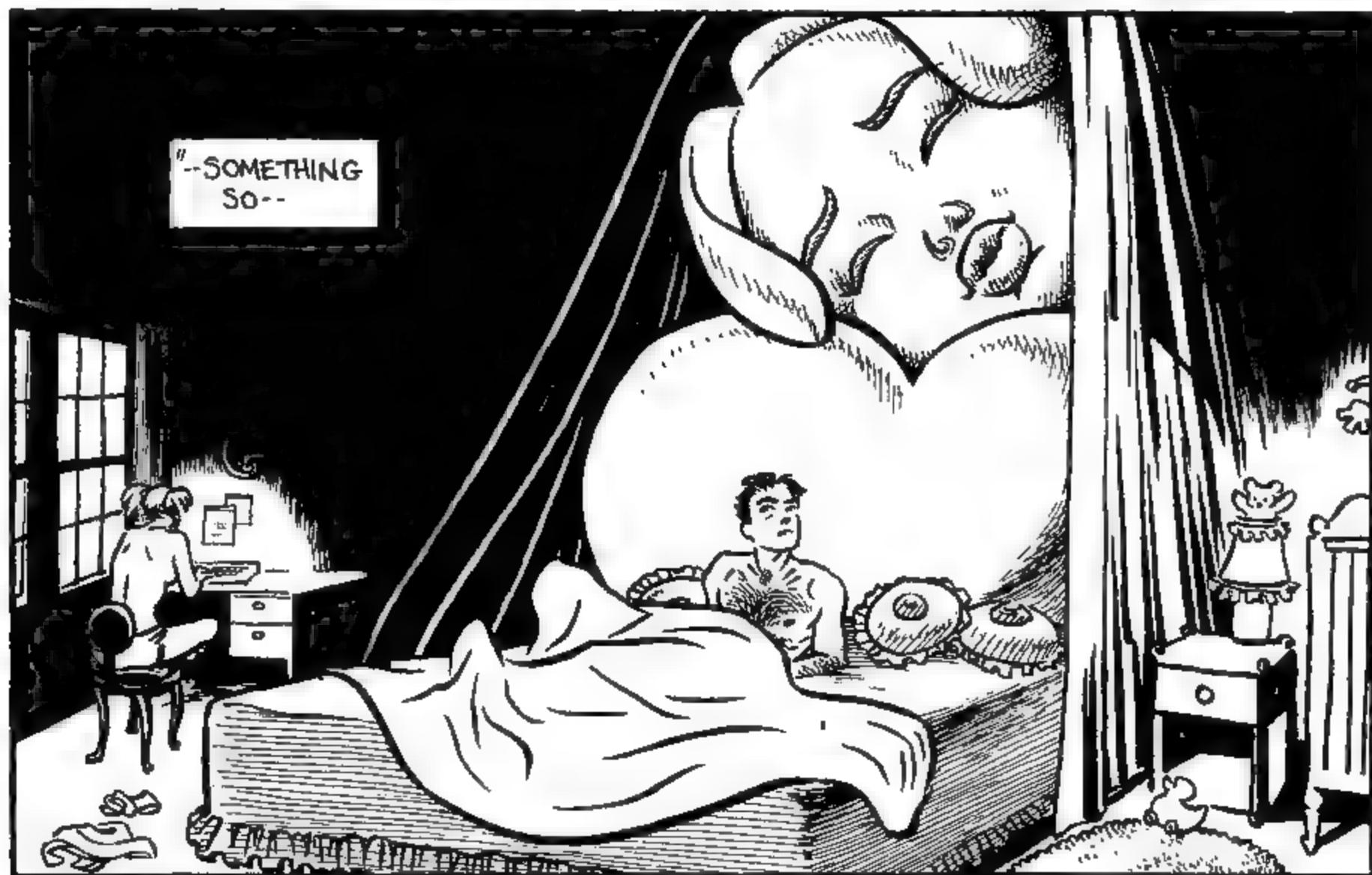
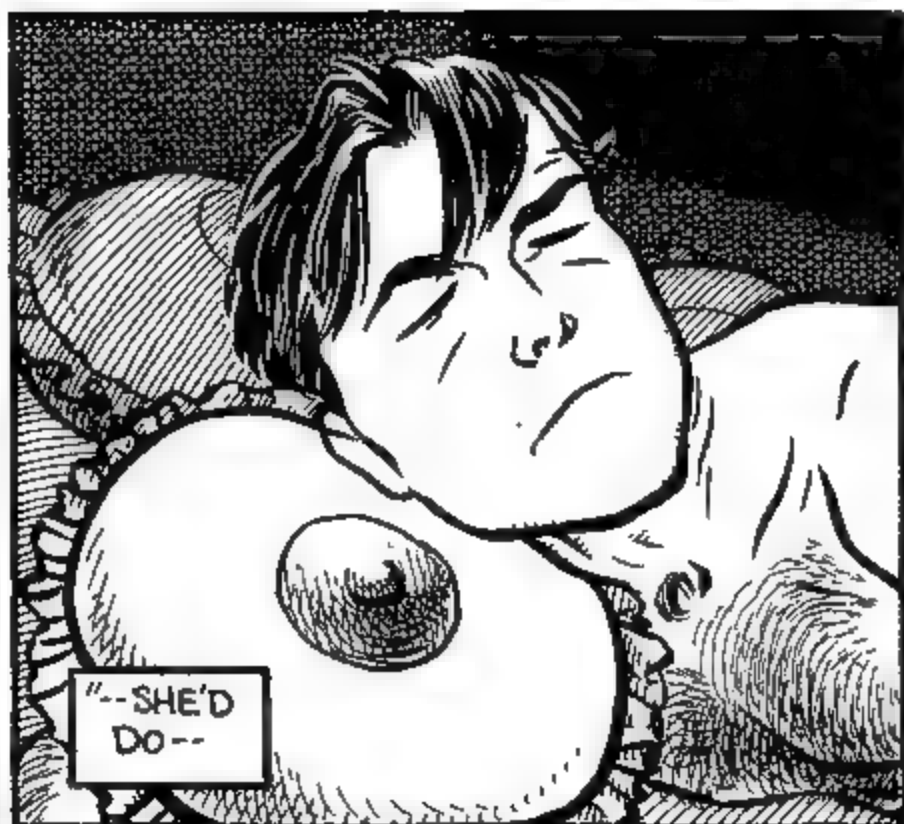


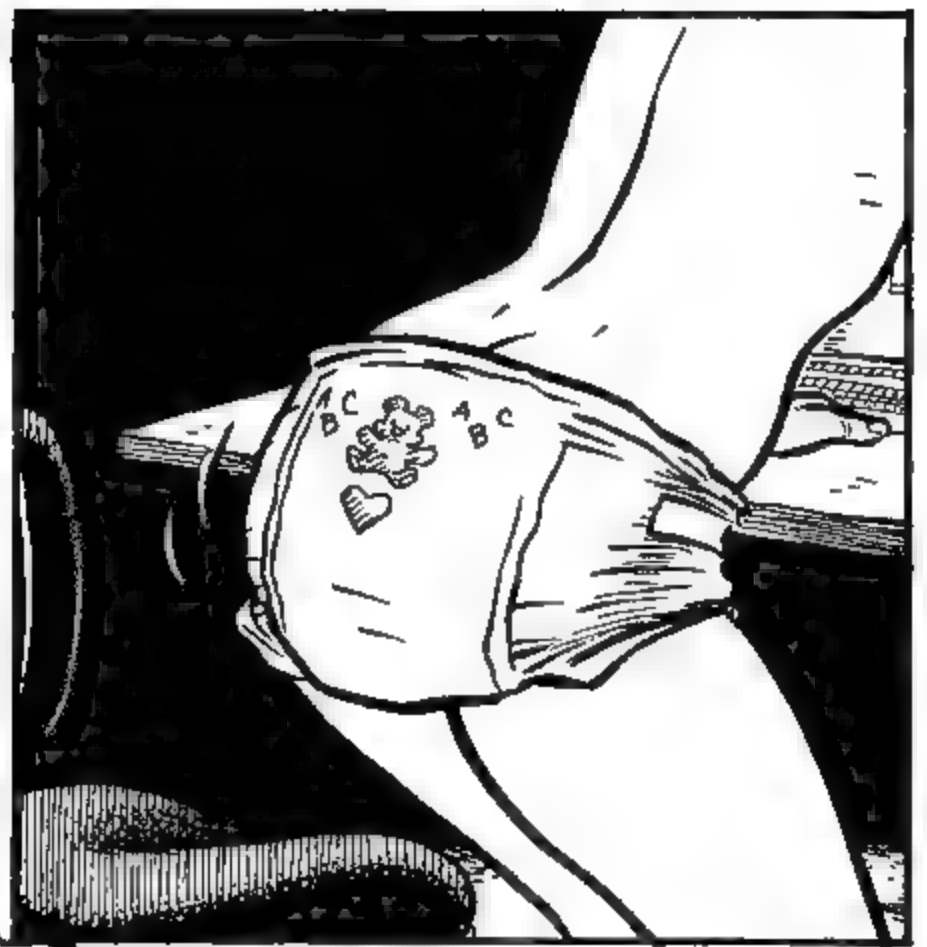












NNNNH!

SHE'S A GROWN WOMAN.

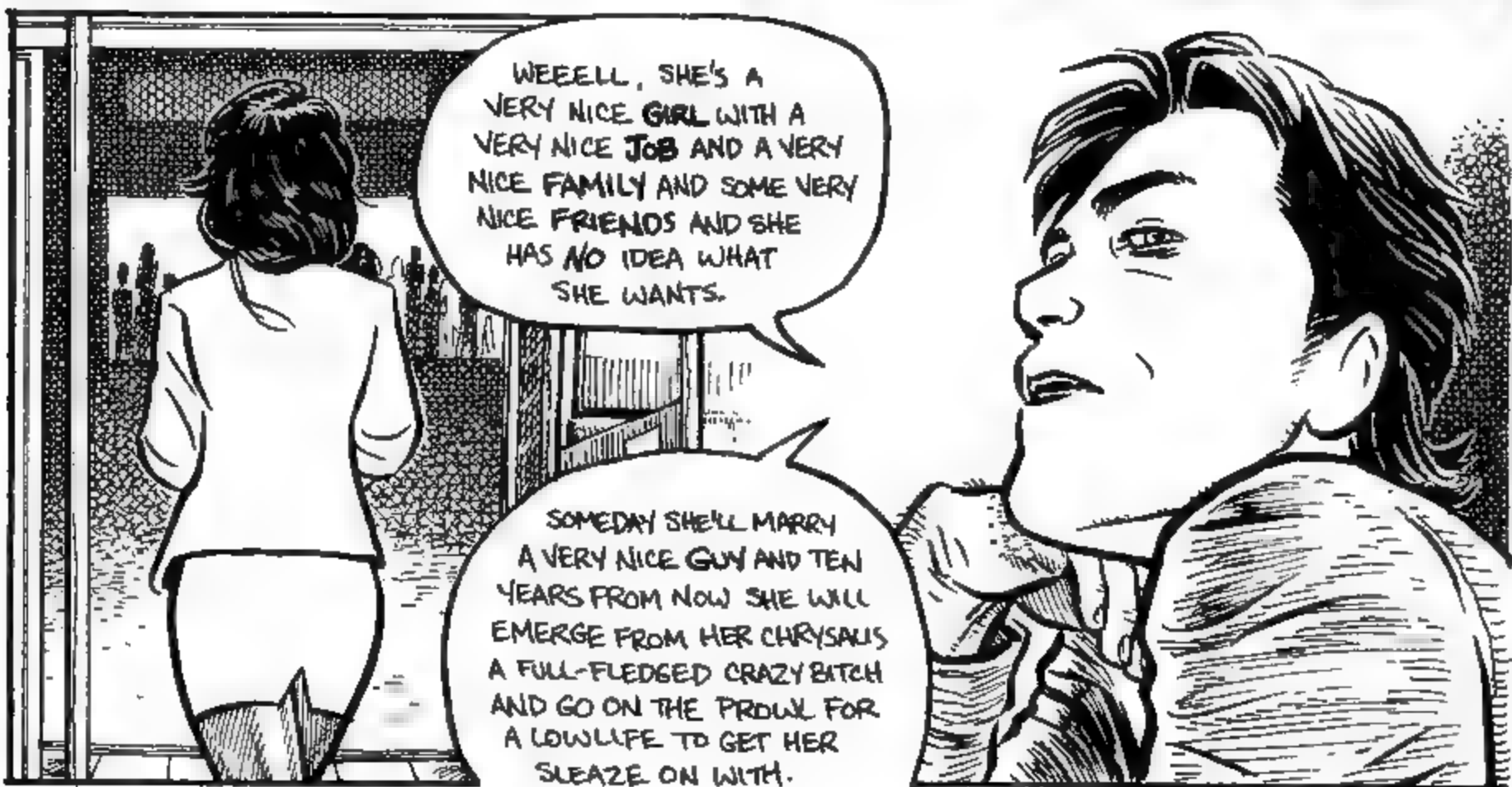
UNH-
UH.

GROWN PEOPLE
ARE INTO ALL KINDS
OF CRAZY THINGS.

UNH-
UH.



ALL POTENTIAL
MATES HAVE, AH...
FLAWS.





AT WHICH
POINT
I'LL CALL
HER.



THAT'S A
FAIRLY
JAUNDICED
VIEW OF
HUMANITY,
MR. AYERS.



I MUTATE
RAPIDLY UNDER
THE INFLUENCE
OF NICE GIRLS...



OKAY, SO
THAT'S FOUR
LOOPY BITCHES.

NO, THAT'S
THREE.
GERMAINE
DOESN'T
COUNT.

WHY, BECAUSE
SHE'S A NICE
GIRL? OR BECAUSE
YOU DIDN'T SLEEP
WITH HER?

WHATEVER.
WHO'S NUMBER
FOUR?

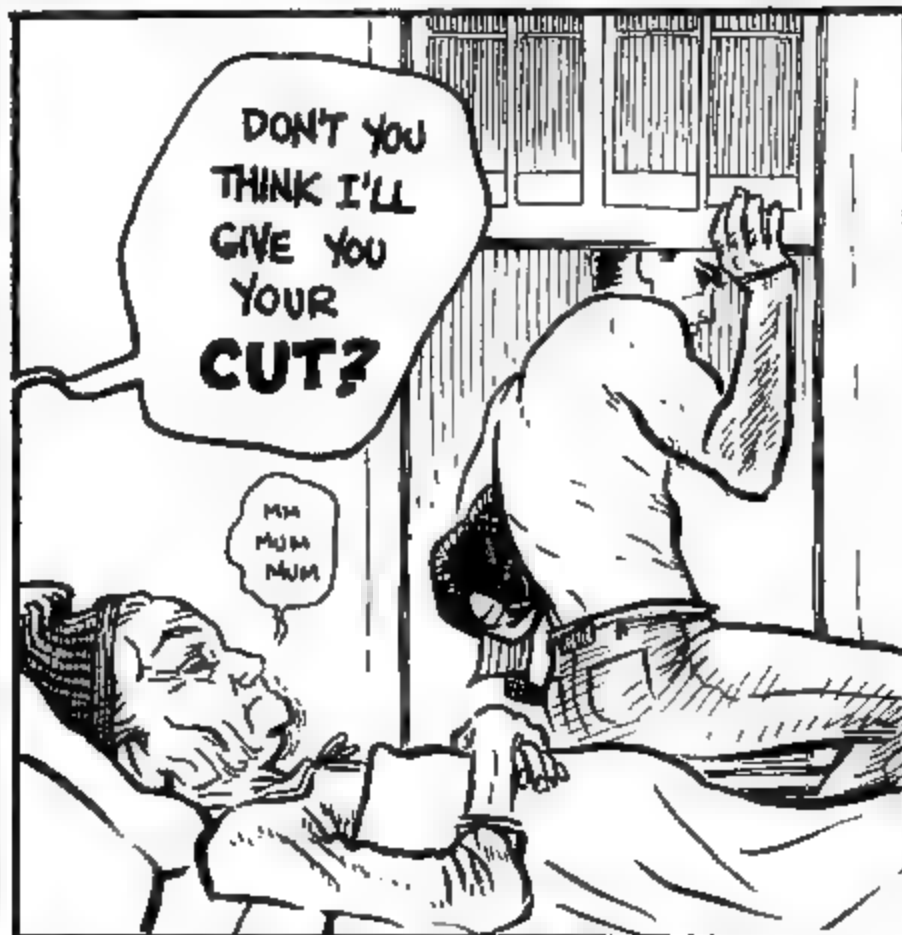
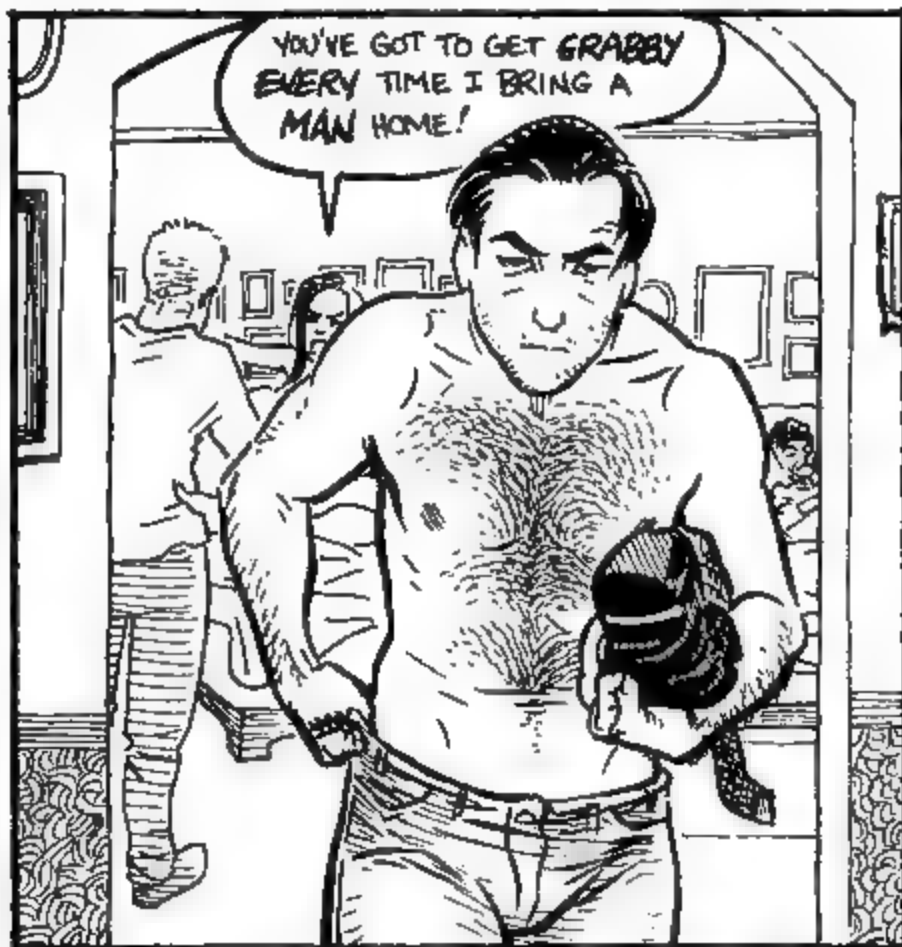
WHO,
YEKAT?

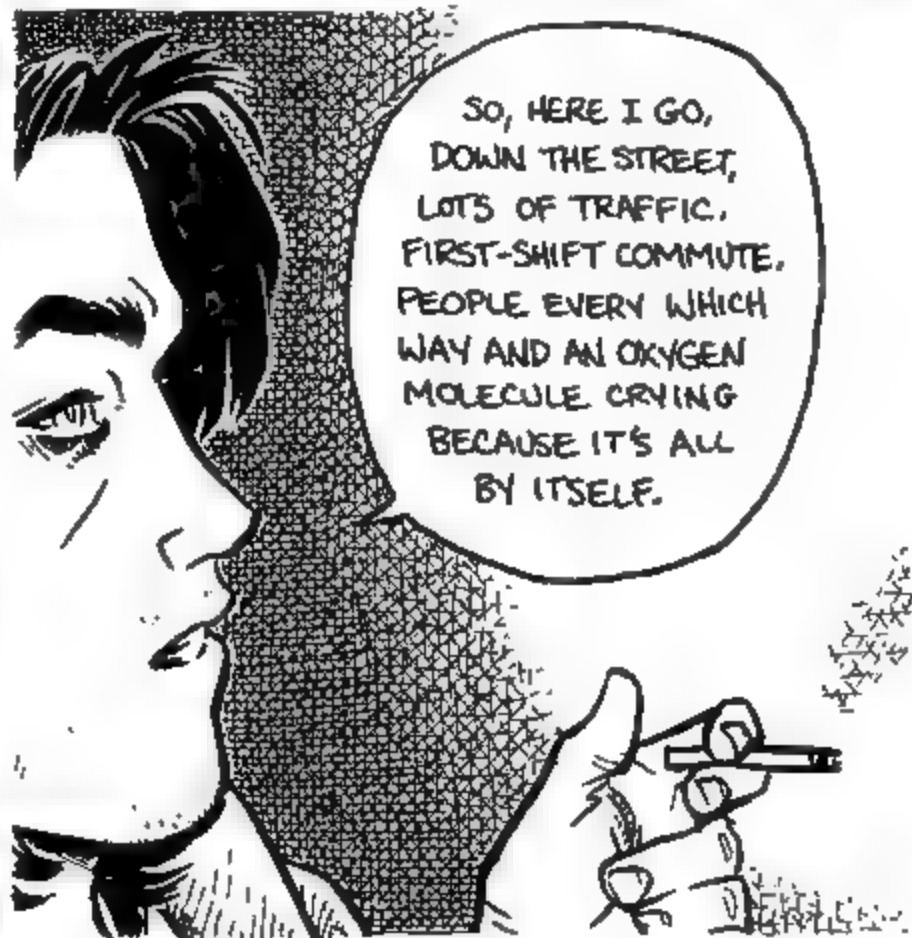
SHE
WAS NICE
TOO.

WHY
DOES SHE
COUNT IF
THE OTHER
ONE
DOESN'T?









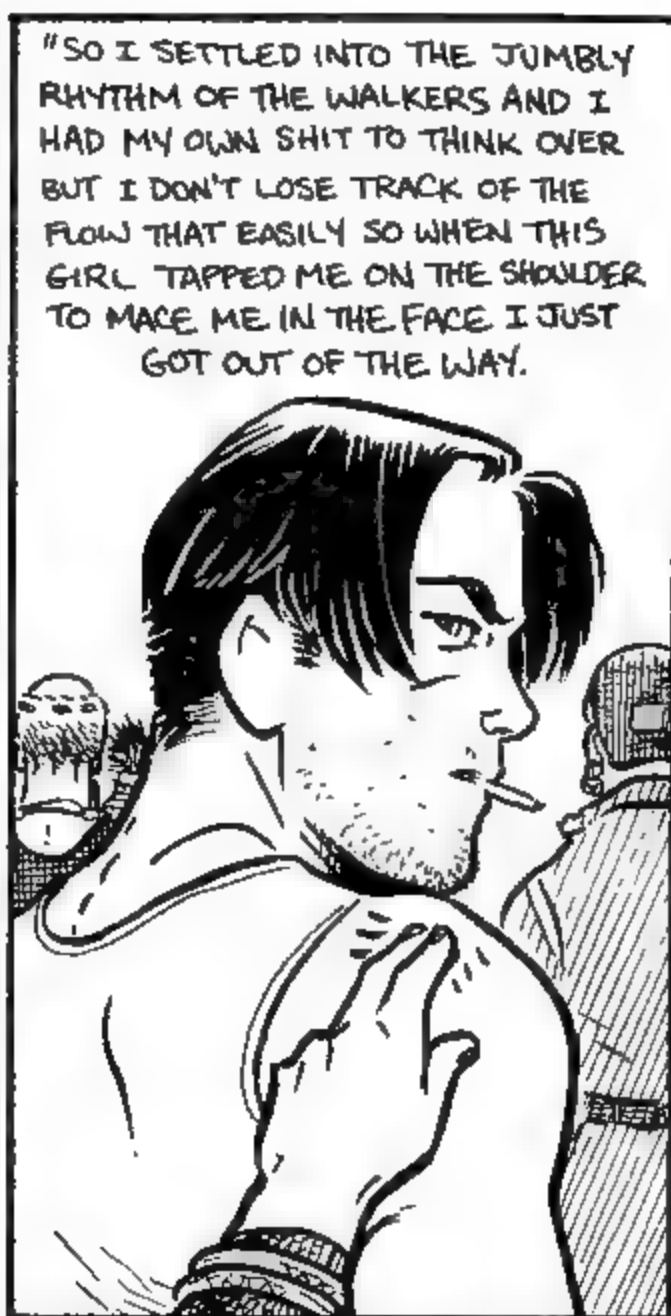


"SEEING WHERE THOSE SPACES ARE IS SOMETIMES EASY. IT'S A MATTER OF GETTING INTO THE CURRENT.

"MOST PEOPLE DON'T **FIGHT**, THEY **DANCE**, THROWING PUNCHES ONE-TWO-TURN-ONE TWO-KICK.

"SAME WITH TRAFFIC. IT'S EVEN MORE DISCIPLINED, THOUGH THE CHANCES YOU'LL GET HIT ARE GREATER BECAUSE OF THAT. SLOW DOWN, SPEED UP, TURN AT THE WRONG TIME, YOU GET OUT OF YOUR SAFE HOLE, AND KABOOMALA.

"MOSTLY THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN. PEOPLE STAY IN THEIR PLACE AND WALK BLITHELY ON, HEAVY TRAFFIC BLASTING BY ALONGSIDE.

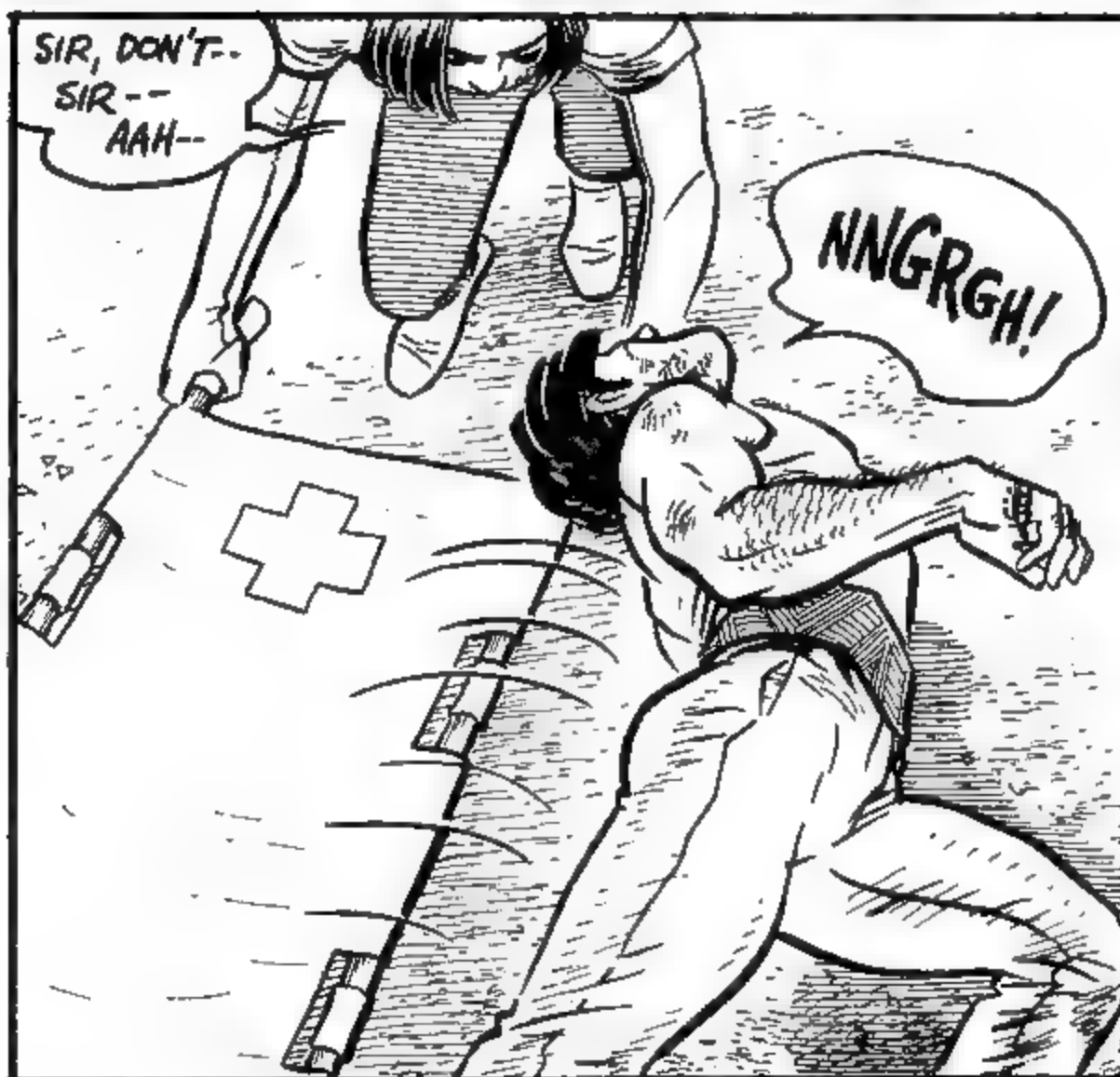


"SO I SETTLED INTO THE JUMBLY RHYTHM OF THE WALKERS AND I HAD MY OWN SHIT TO THINK OVER BUT I DON'T LOSE TRACK OF THE FLOW THAT EASILY SO WHEN THIS GIRL TAPPED ME ON THE SHOULDER TO MAKE ME IN THE FACE I JUST GOT OUT OF THE WAY.



"ONLY PROBLEM WAS, THERE WAS ANOTHER GUY IN THE WAY THAT I VACATED AND SO HE GOT THE FULL BLAST, AND THIS WAS A REALLY BIG GUY--"







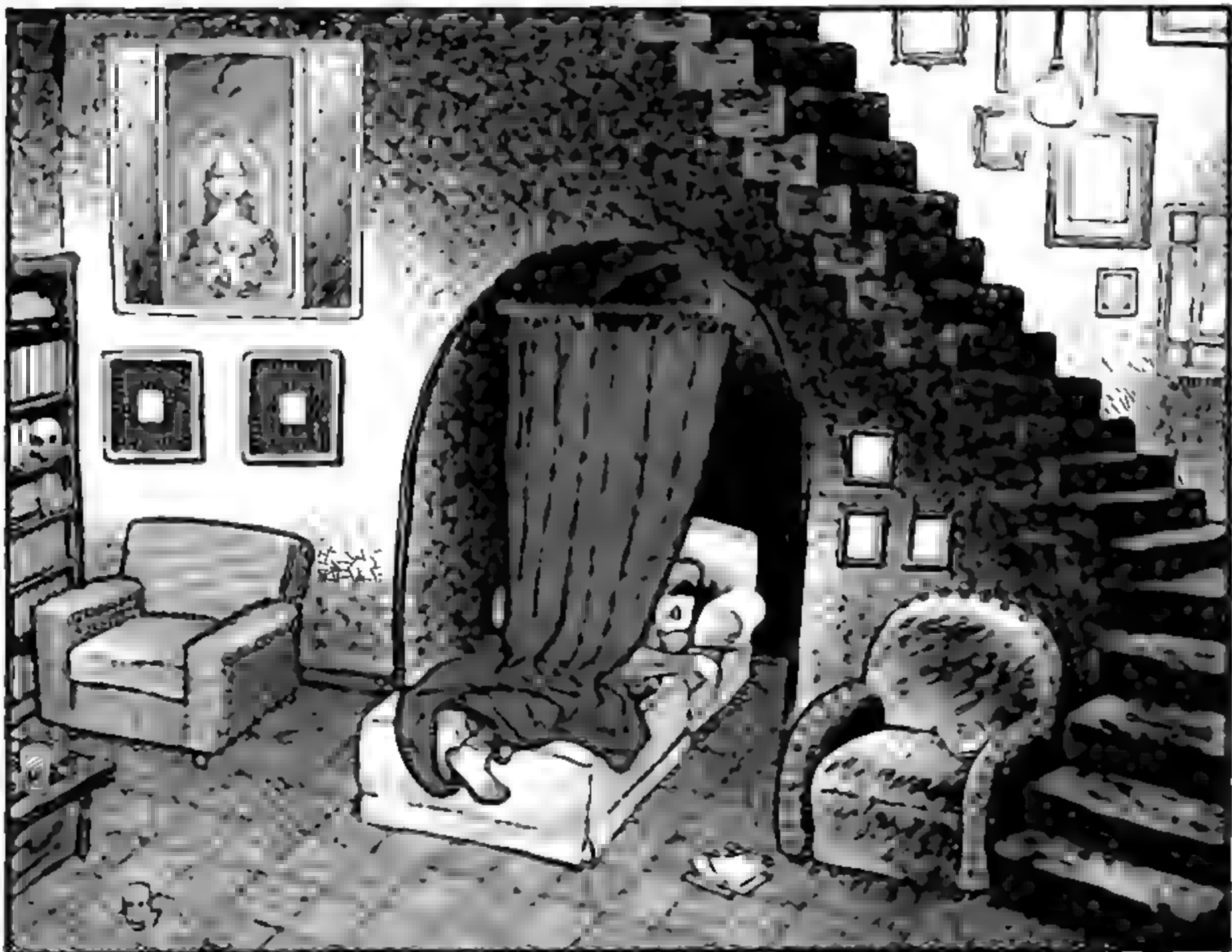


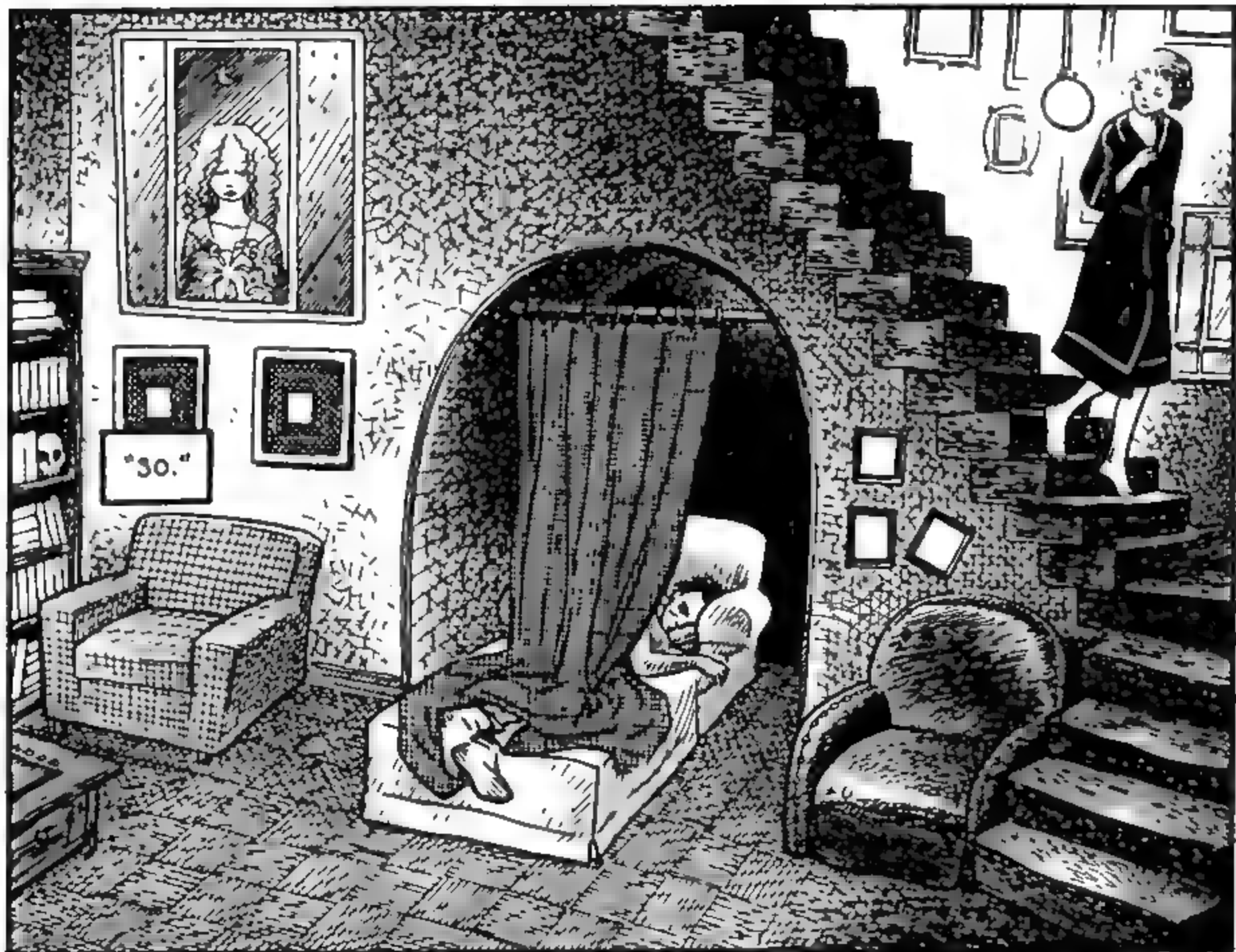


CHAPTER FOUR:



THE TAIL FAIRY





"YOU WENT BACK TO GRAZIE, THE GIRL WITH THE MASTER'S THESIS AND THE FETISH TV SHOW."



NOW.

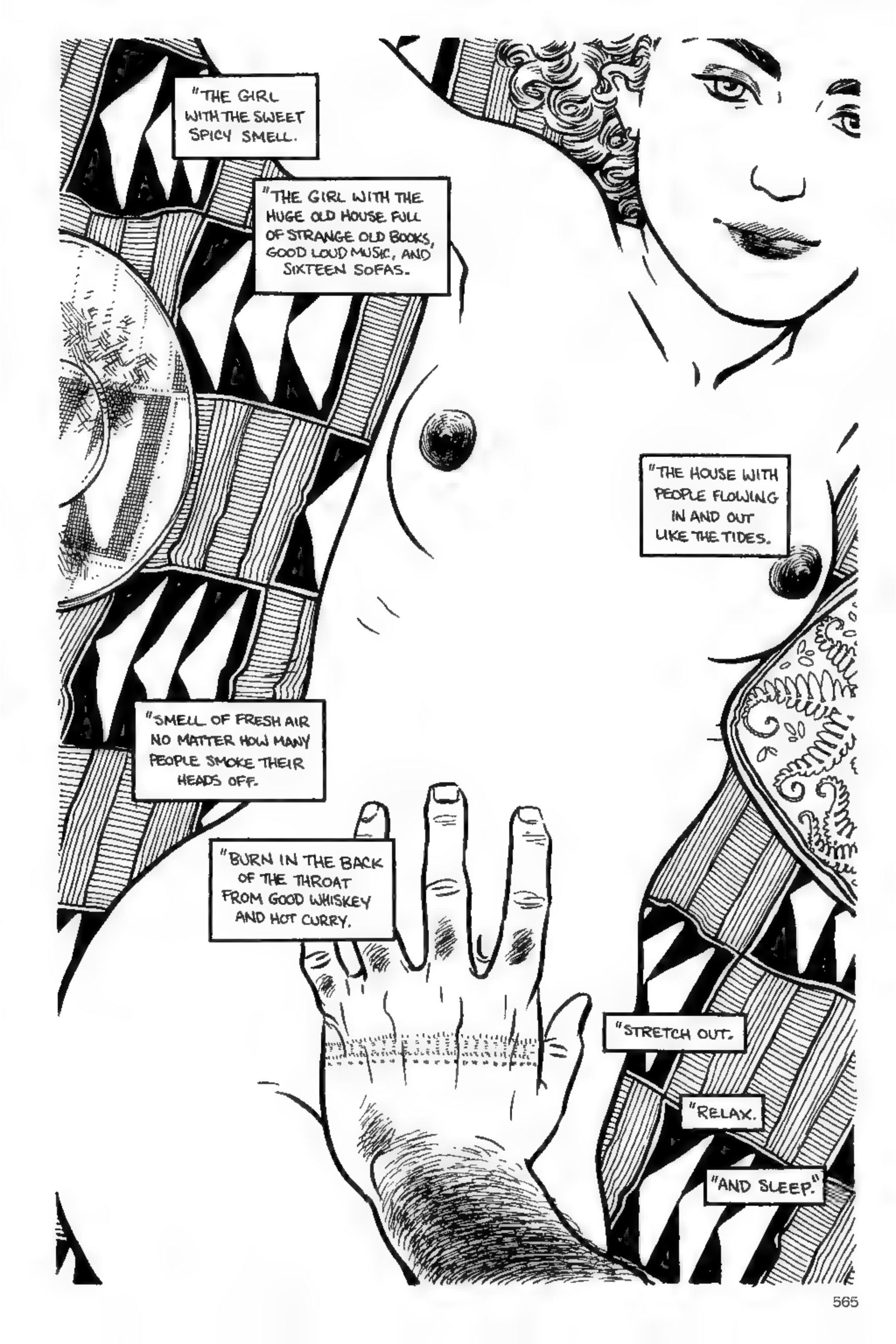


WHERE DOES IT HURT?

"I WENT BACK TO GRAZIE, THE GIRL WITH THE FETISH."

"OH."





"THE GIRL
WITH THE SWEET
SPICY SMELL.

"THE GIRL WITH THE
HUGE OLD HOUSE FULL
OF STRANGE OLD BOOKS,
GOOD LOUD MUSIC, AND
SIXTEEN SOFAS.

"THE HOUSE WITH
PEOPLE FLOWING
IN AND OUT
LIKE THE TIDES.

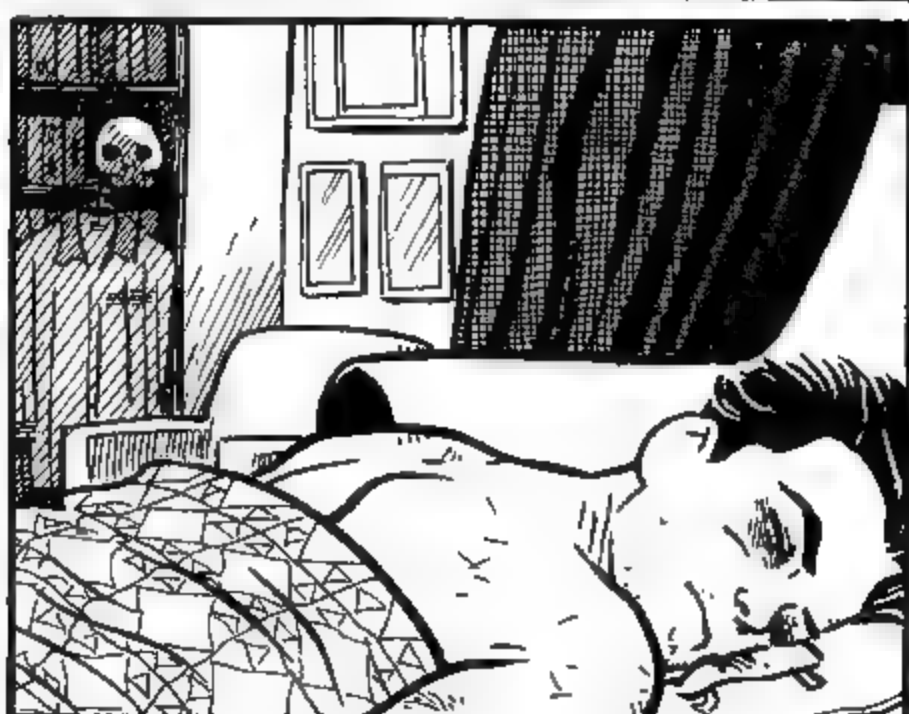
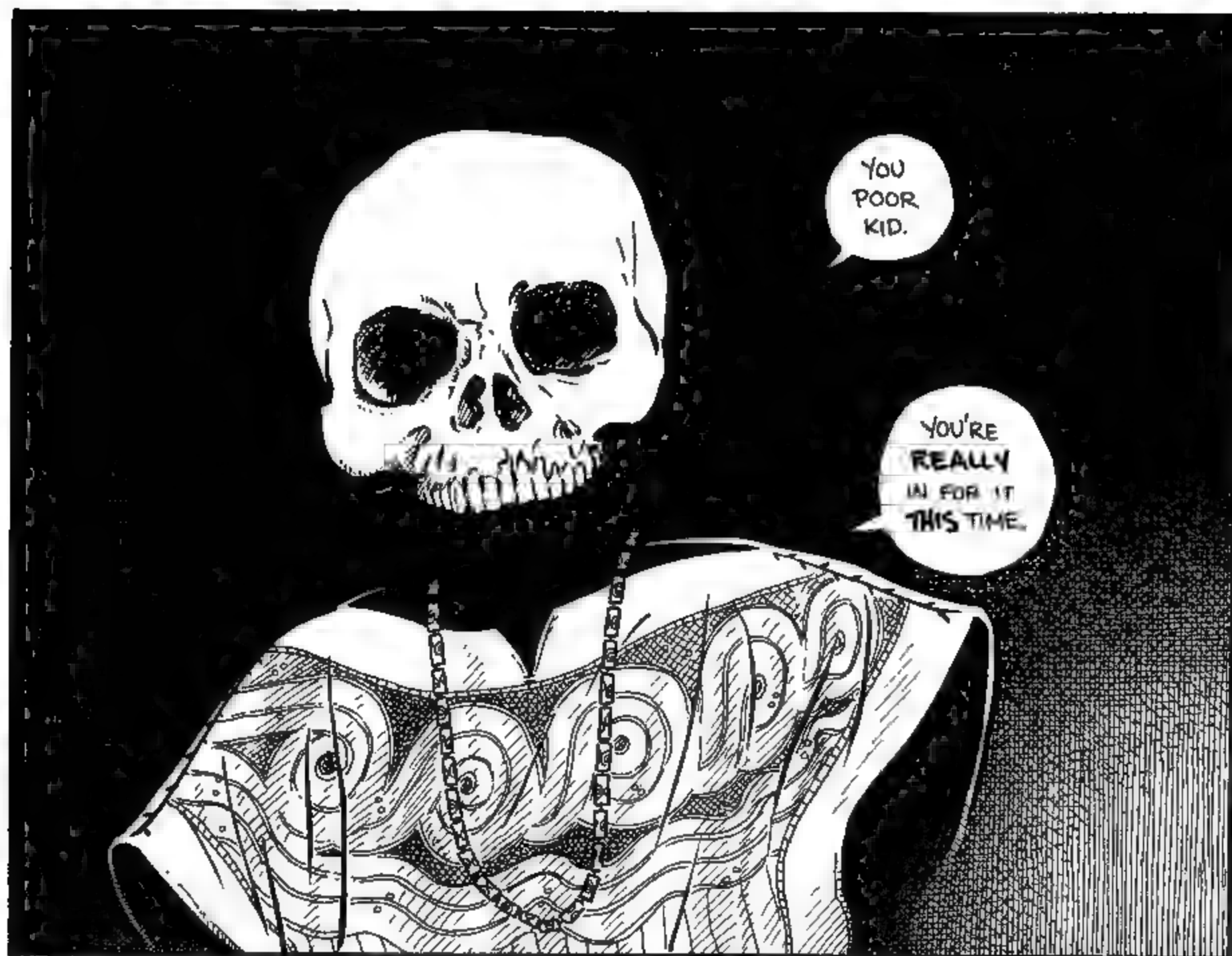
"SMELL OF FRESH AIR
NO MATTER HOW MANY
PEOPLE SMOKE THEIR
HEADS OFF.

"BURN IN THE BACK
OF THE THROAT
FROM GOOD WHISKEY
AND HOT CURRY.

"STRETCH OUT.

"RELAX.

"AND SLEEP."



NOW WAIT
A MINUTE.

WHAT?

YOU FELL OFF ONE
OF THOSE GODDAMN
DEATH-TRAP HIGH CURBS
IN THE BUSINESS
DISTRICT?

YEAH.

AND YOU
NATURALLY
GOT HIT BY A
CAR AND WERE
TAKEN TO A
HOSPITAL?

I GOT TAKEN TO
A HOSPITAL BECAUSE
I GOT HIT BY AN
AMBULANCE.

YOU GOT HIT
BY AN
AMBULANCE.

WELL NO, BUT
THERE WAS ONE IN
THE TRAFFIC FLOW
AT THE SCENE. SO
THEY STOPPED.

YOU'RE SAYING
YOU WERE, WHAT,
KIDNAPPED BY
PARAMEDICS?
FORCED INTO AN
EMERGENCY ROOM
AGAINST YOUR
WILL?

HOW **ELSE** YOU
THINK A TRIBAL LIKE
ME IS GONNA GET
HOSPITAL TREATMENT?

OH. THEY WERE
HAVING A SLOW DAY.
IS THAT IT? NOTHING
BETTER TO DO?

IT'S LIKE
I TOLD YOU --

AND TOLD
ME, AND TOLD
ME --

--IT WASN'T
THAT BAD.





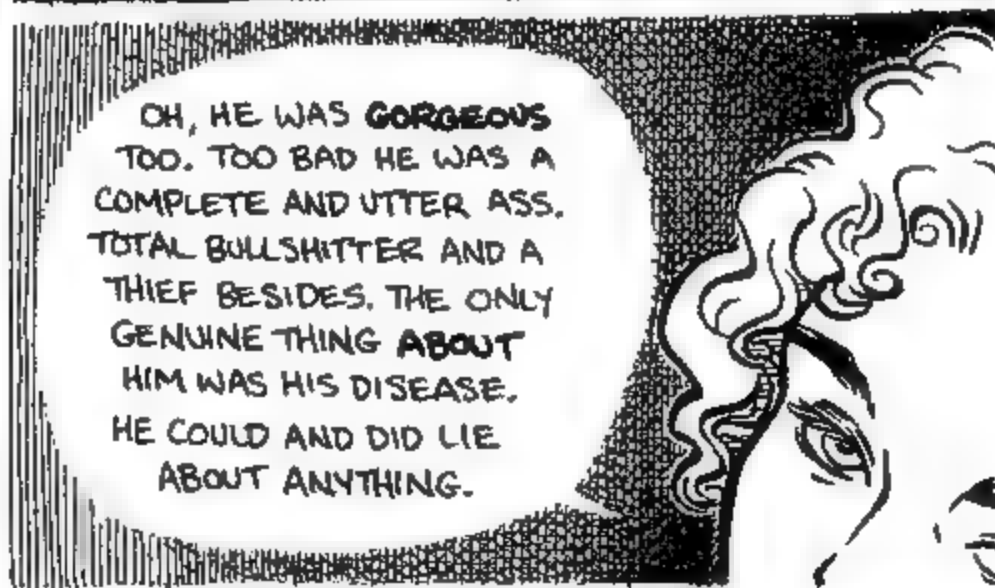


I HAVE NEVER
HAD A LOVER WITH A
TERMINAL DISEASE.



ENZO, WHO HAD CHRONIC
MALARIA, HE CAME CLOSE
TO BEING MY PERFECT
OBJECT.

HE GOT REALLY, INCREDIBLY, BIZARRELY
ILL AT DRAMATIC MOMENTS, AND ALWAYS
GOT BETTER AFTER A FEW DAYS' REST
AND A HANDFUL OF BIG PINK PILLS.



OH, HE WAS GORGEOUS
TOO. TOO BAD HE WAS A
COMPLETE AND UTTER ASS.
TOTAL BULLSHITTER AND A
THIEF BESIDES. THE ONLY
GENUINE THING ABOUT
HIM WAS HIS DISEASE.
HE COULD AND DID LIE
ABOUT ANYTHING.



BUT HE
COULDN'T
FAKE HIS
ILLNESS.

AND IT
COULDN'T
BE
CURED.

THAT
WAS WHAT
MADE IT SO
INTOXICATING.







"HAVE YOU NOT ALWAYS SAID YOU HATE TO STAY MORE THAN THREE DAYS AT THE SAME HOUSE? TOO... APPALLINGLY DOMESTIC, I THINK IT WAS?"

YEAH.

"THERE WAS YOUR CHANCE; YOU SURELY COULD HAVE GONE TO THE SUMPTUOUS ABODE OF EMMA GROSVENOR AND CAUGHT UP WITH HER AND HER FAMILY, FOR ONCE WITHOUT HER HUSBAND IN THE WAY, AND YOU DIDN'T."

DIDN'T FEEL UP TO IT PROBABLY SHOULDN'T HAVE GONE OUT AT ALL. HAD TO STOP A BUNCH OF TIMES ON THE WAY BACK.

"YOU HUNG AROUND GRAZIE'S ALL THAT TIME."

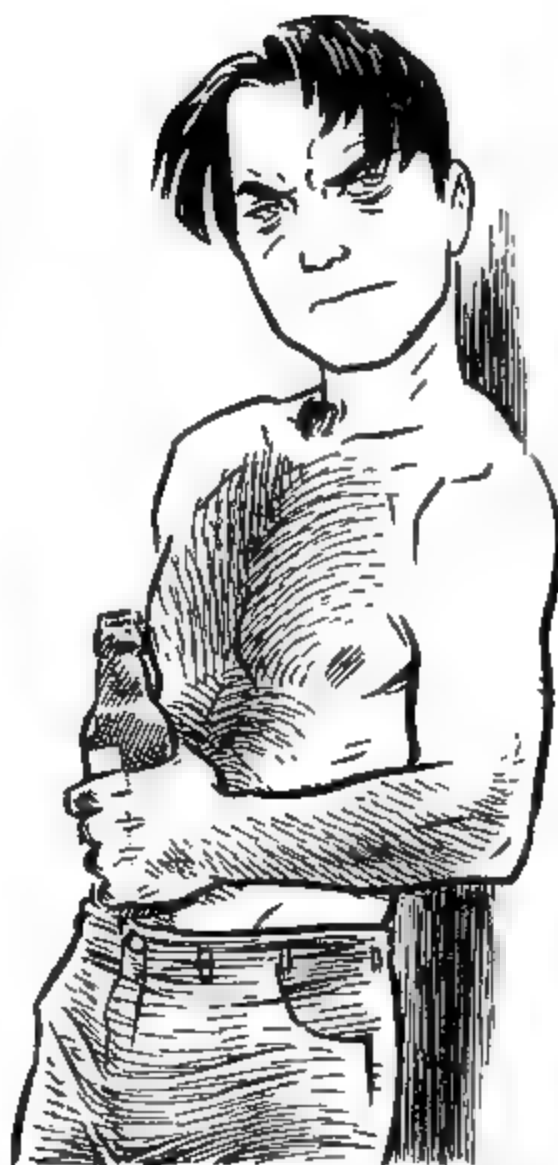
YEAH.

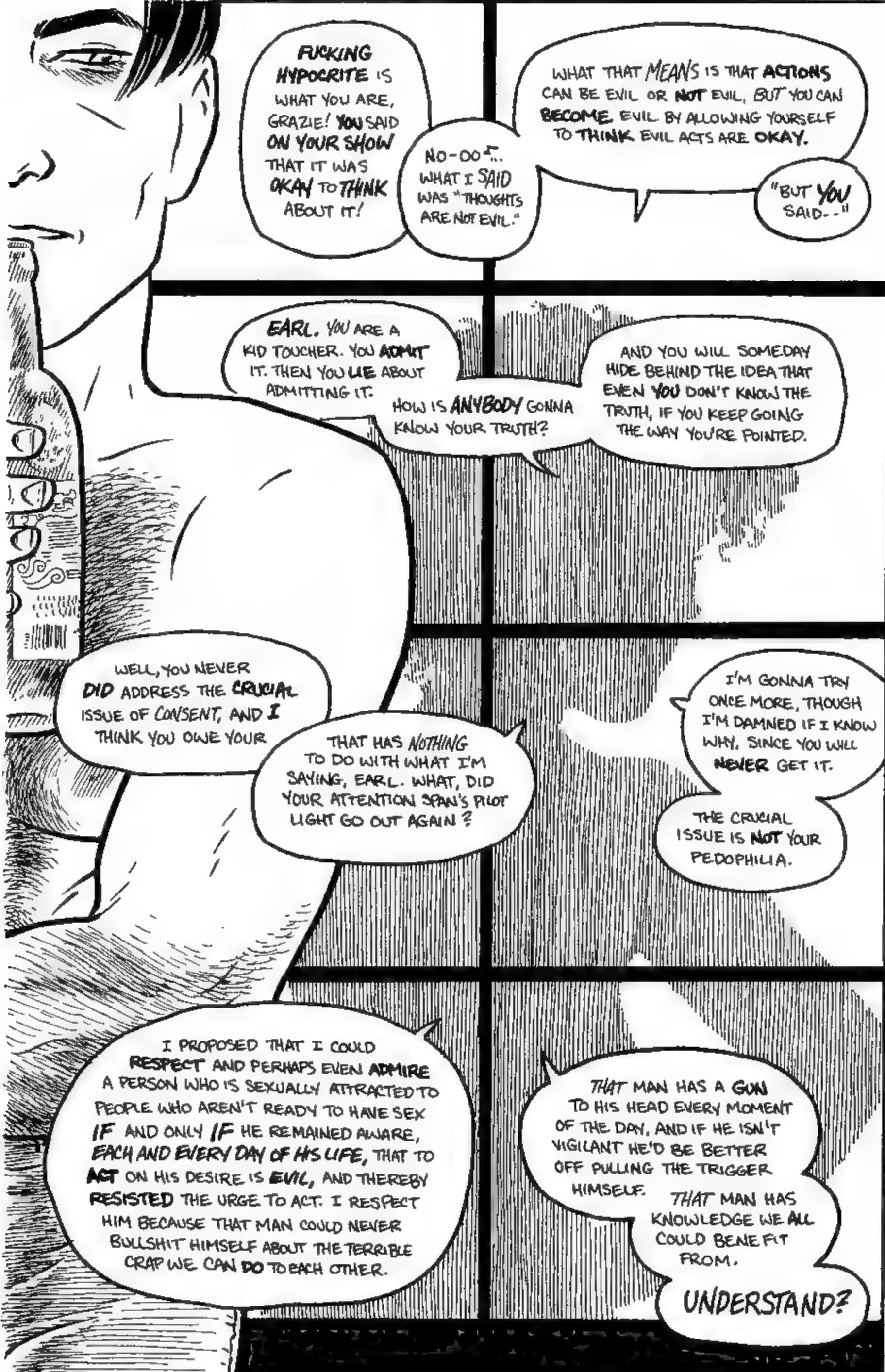
"BECAUSE YOU NEEDED TO CONVALESCENCE."

"FROM 'NOTHING MUCH' AND 'IT'S NOT THAT BAD' AND 'I DIDN'T GET HIT BY A CAR.'"

NEVER SAID I DIDN'T GET HIT BY A CAR.

"NO, YOU JUST BLEW IT OFF LIKE IT WAS NOTHING."





FUCKING HYPOCRITE IS WHAT YOU ARE, GRAZIE! YOU SAID ON YOUR SHOW THAT IT WAS **OKAY** TO **THINK** ABOUT IT!

NO-DO-...
WHAT I SAID WAS "THOUGHTS ARE NOT EVIL."

WHAT THAT **MEANS** IS THAT **ACTIONS** CAN BE EVIL OR **NOT** EVIL, BUT YOU CAN **BECOME** EVIL BY ALLOWING YOURSELF TO **THINK** EVIL ACTS ARE **OKAY**.

"BUT **YOU** SAID--"

EARL, YOU ARE A KID TOUCHER. YOU **ADMIT** IT. THEN YOU **LIE** ABOUT ADMITTING IT.

HOW IS **ANYBODY** GONNA KNOW YOUR TRUTH?

AND YOU WILL SOMEDAY HIDE BEHIND THE IDEA THAT EVEN **YOU** DON'T KNOW THE TRUTH, IF YOU KEEP GOING THE WAY YOU'RE POINTED.

WELL, YOU NEVER **DID** ADDRESS THE **CRUCIAL** ISSUE OF **CONSENT**, AND I THINK YOU OWE YOUR

THAT HAS **NOTHING** TO DO WITH WHAT I'M SAYING, **EARL**. WHAT, DID YOUR ATTENTION SPAN'S PILOT LIGHT GO OUT AGAIN?

I'M GONNA TRY ONCE MORE, THOUGH I'M DAMNED IF I KNOW WHY, SINCE YOU WILL **NEVER** GET IT.

THE **CRUCIAL** ISSUE IS **NOT** YOUR PEDOPHILIA.

I PROPOSED THAT I COULD **RESPECT** AND PERHAPS EVEN **ADMIRE** A PERSON WHO IS SEXUALLY ATTRACTED TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T READY TO HAVE SEX **IF** AND ONLY **IF** HE REMAINED AWARE, **EACH AND EVERY DAY OF HIS LIFE**, THAT TO **ACT** ON HIS DESIRE IS **EVIL**, AND THEREBY **RESISTED** THE URGE TO ACT. I RESPECT HIM BECAUSE THAT MAN COULD NEVER **BULLSHIT** HIMSELF ABOUT THE TERRIBLE CRAP WE CAN DO TO EACH OTHER.

THAT MAN HAS A **GUN** TO HIS HEAD EVERY MOMENT OF THE DAY, AND IF HE ISN'T VIGILANT HE'D BE BETTER OFF PULLING THE TRIGGER HIMSELF.

THAT MAN HAS KNOWLEDGE WE ALL COULD BENEFIT FROM.

UNDERSTAND?



YOU'RE
SEXIST!

YOU KEEP
SAYING "HE"
LIKE IT'S ONLY
MEN!

OUT OUT OUT
FUCKING OUT.

I CHANGED MY
MIND EARL. EVERY
BABY RAPER I'VE EVER
MET HAD TO BE A HUGE
GODDAMN BULLSHIT
ARTIST JUST TO GET
AS FAR AS ADMITTING
THEY'RE PEDOS.

"PRETTY STANDARD
GRAZIE BEATDOWN.
IF YOU CULTIVATE
WEIRDOES, SOMETIMES
YOU HAVE TO WEED.



"HERE WAS THE PART
THAT SURPRISED ME..

"GUY'S MAD. HE'S
WALKING OUT.
HE DIDN'T GET
THE LAST WORD.



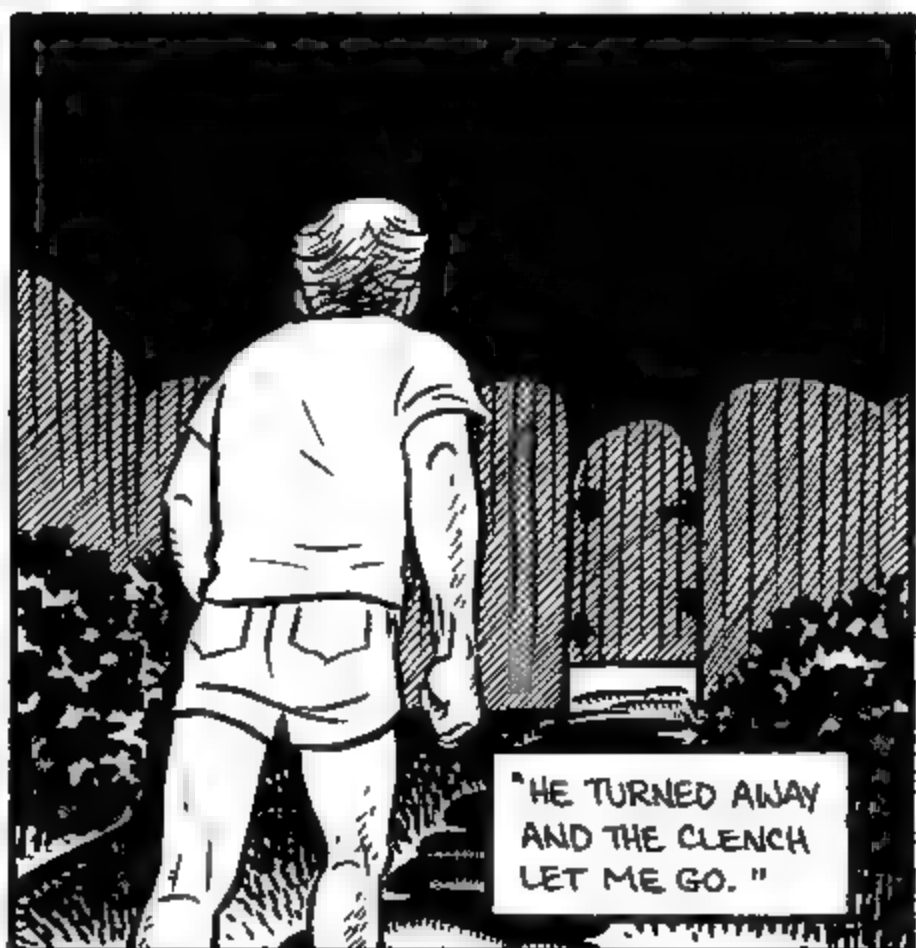
"HE HALF
TURNED.

"AND THERE WAS
SOMETHING IN THE
WAY HE TURNED--

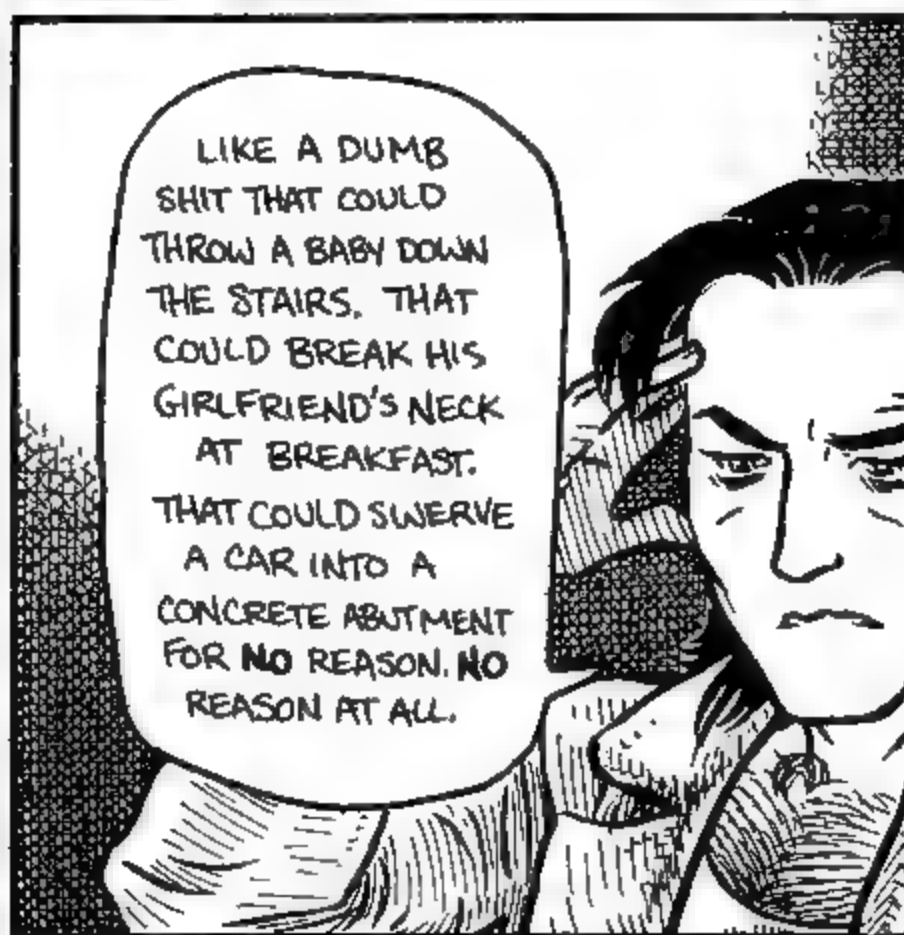
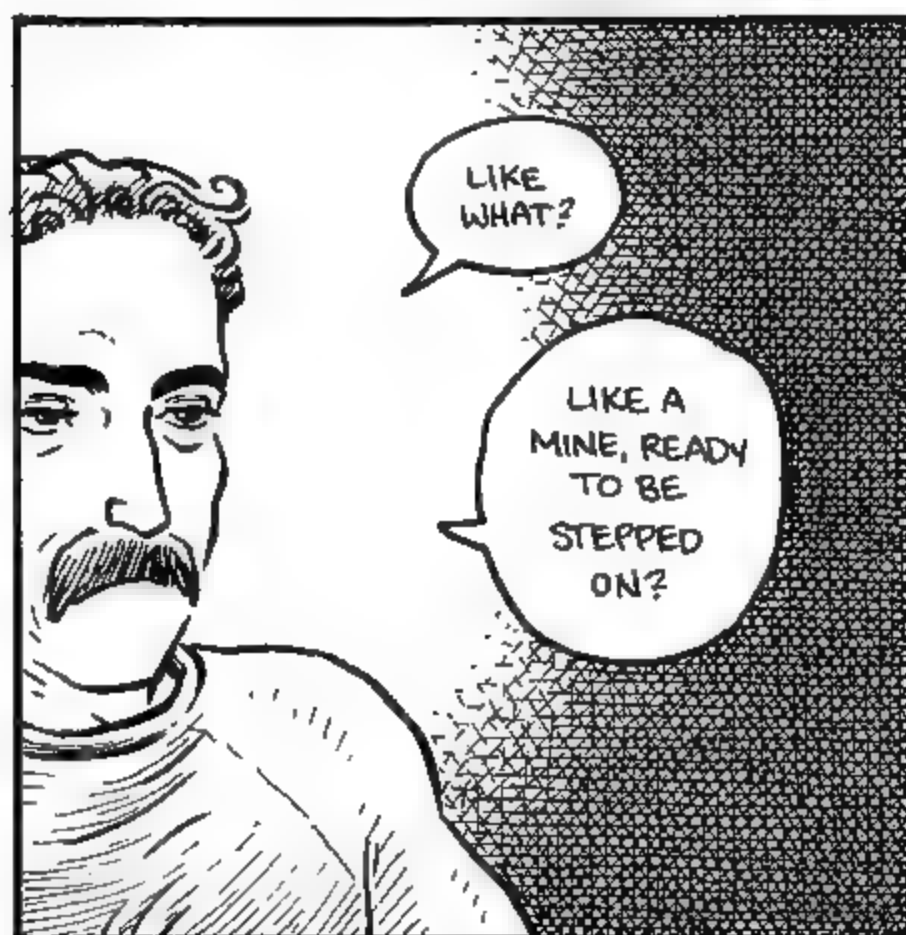
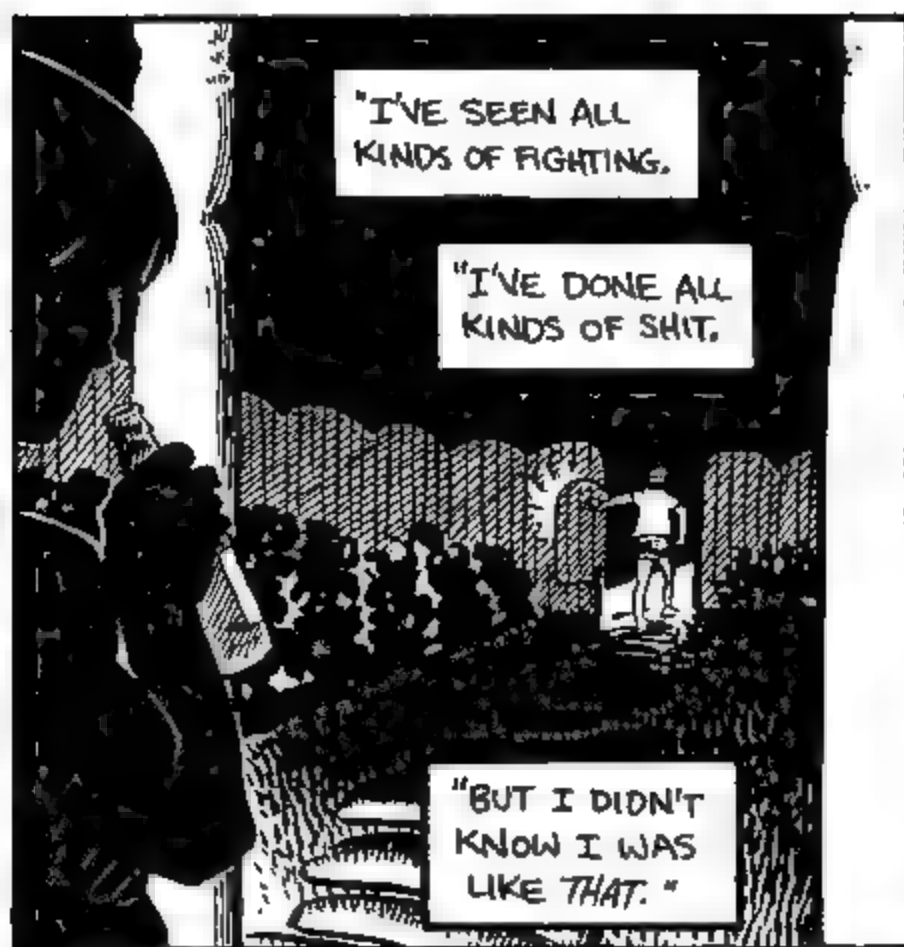
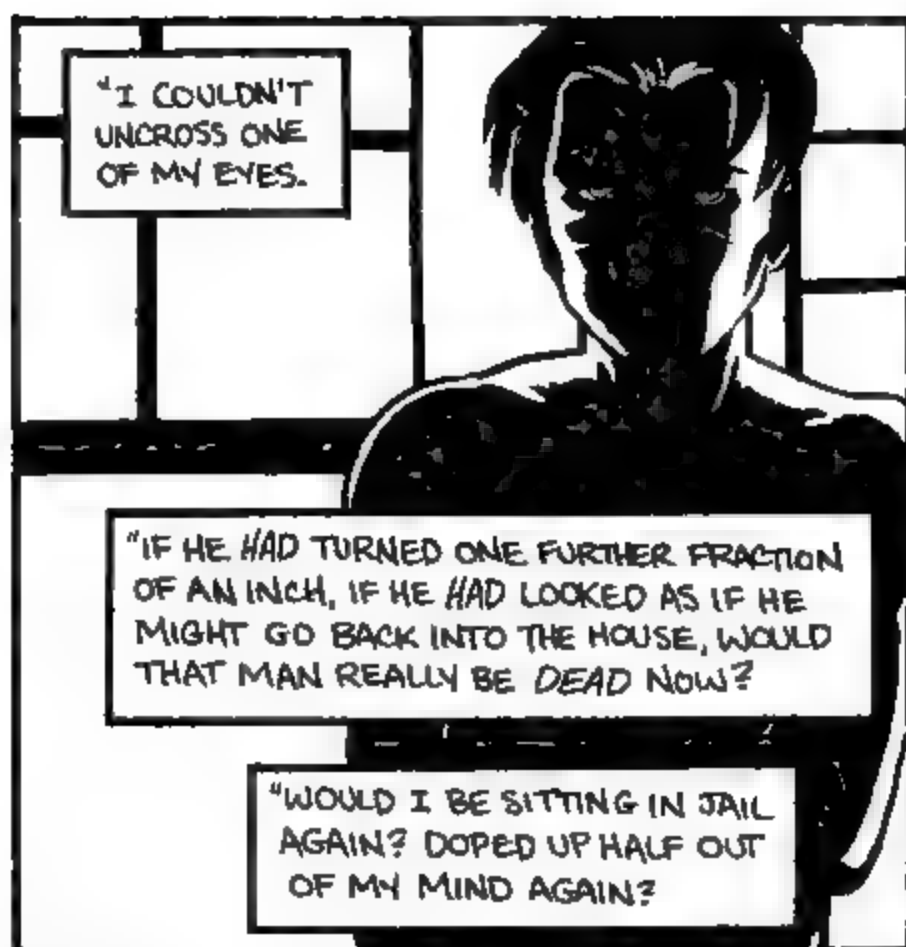
"SOMETHING IN
THE WAY HE WAS
STANDING--

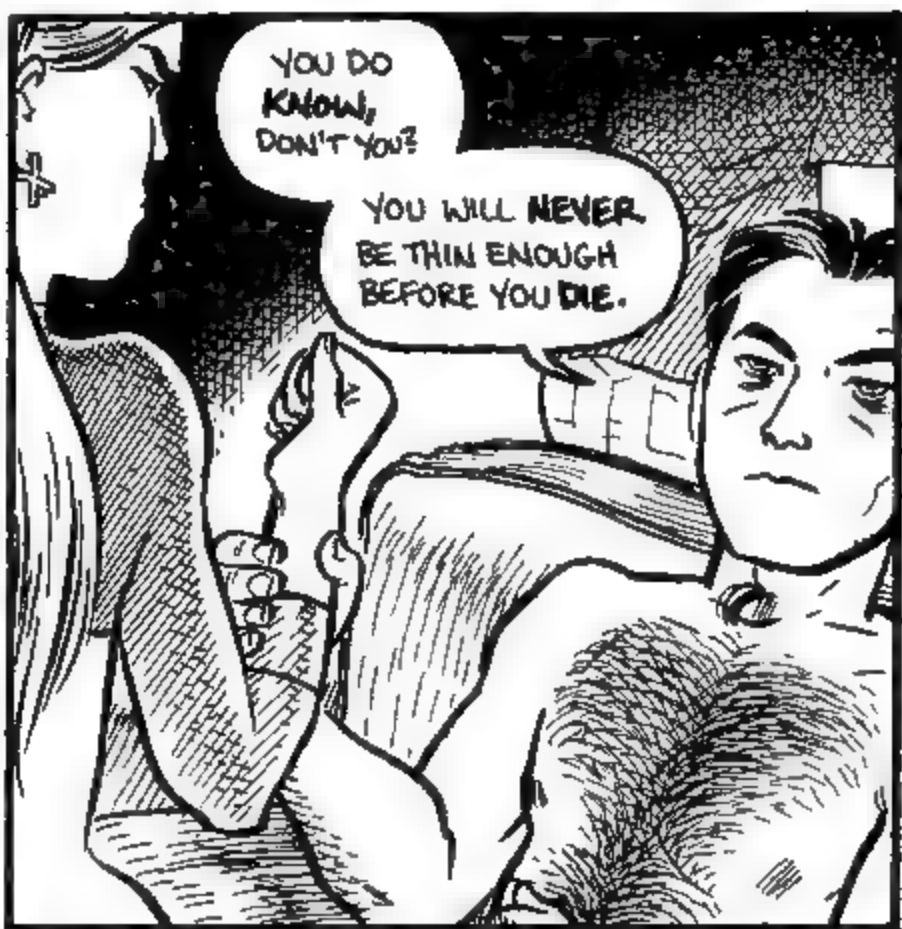
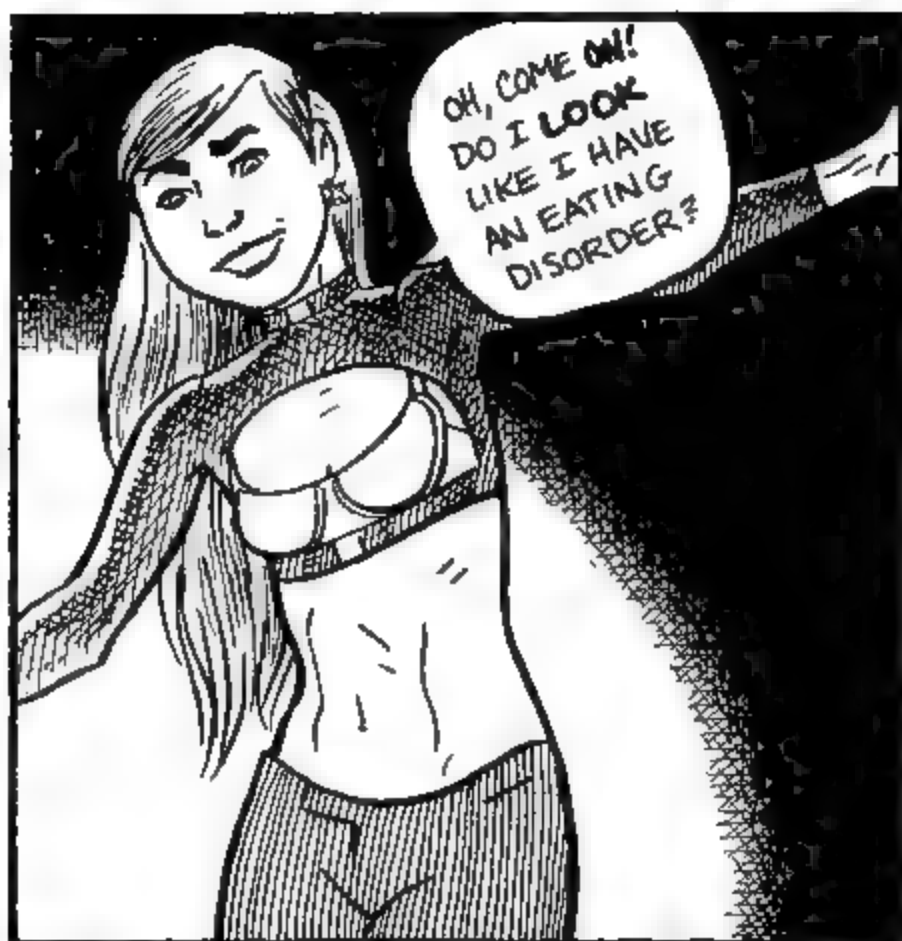


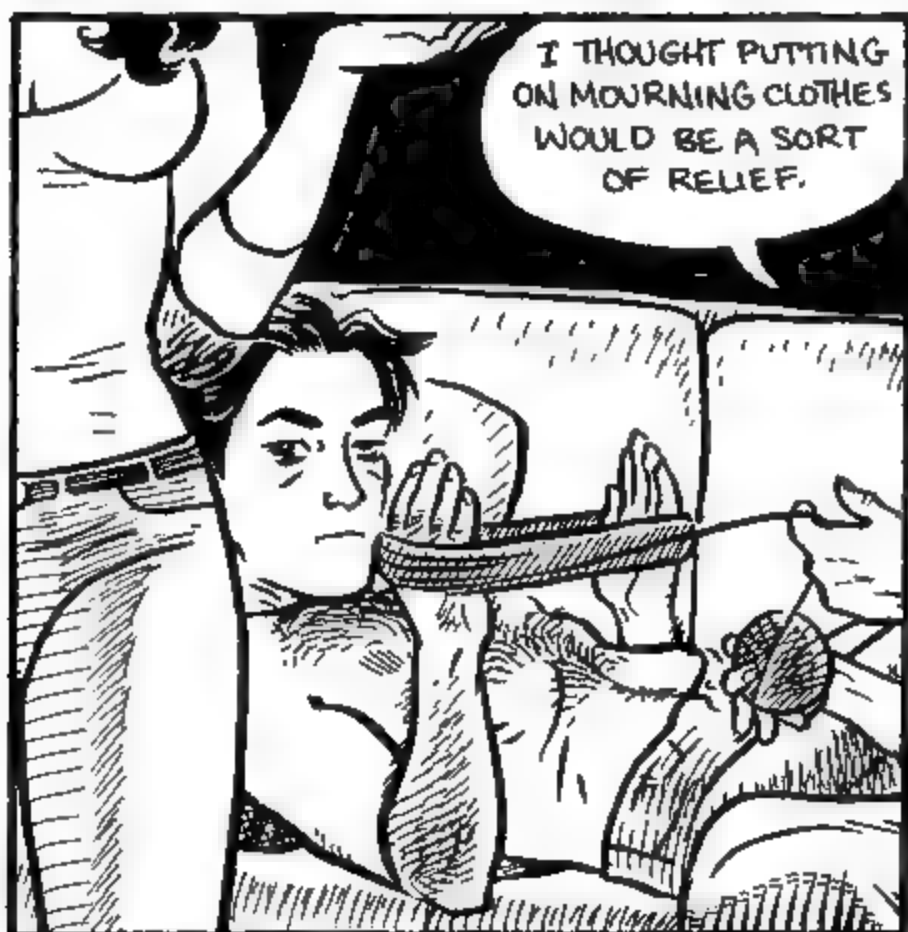
"A HOOK CAUGHT
UNDER MY
RIB CAGE..

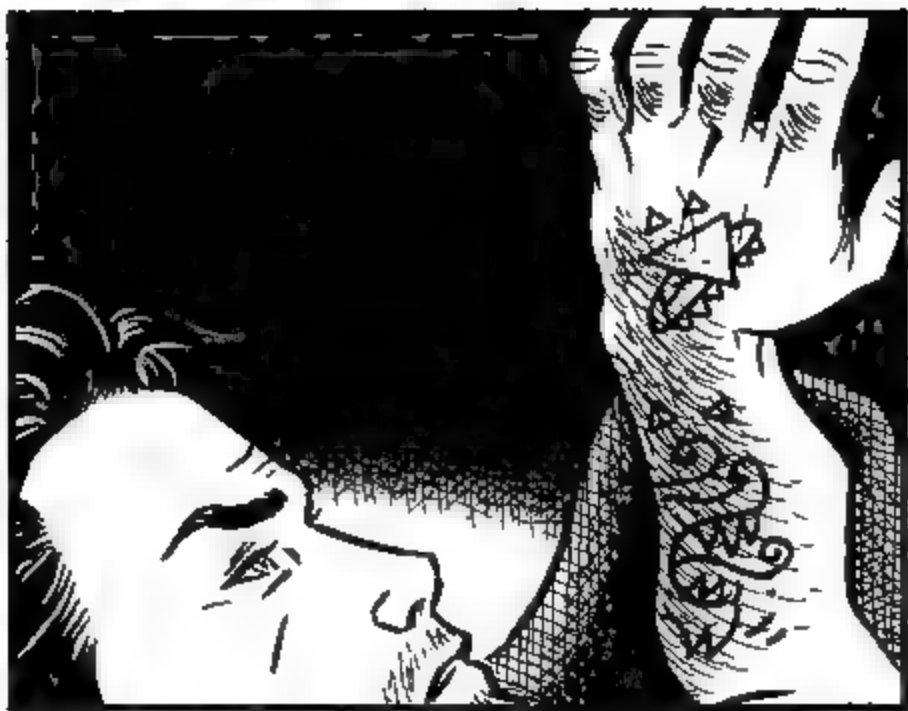
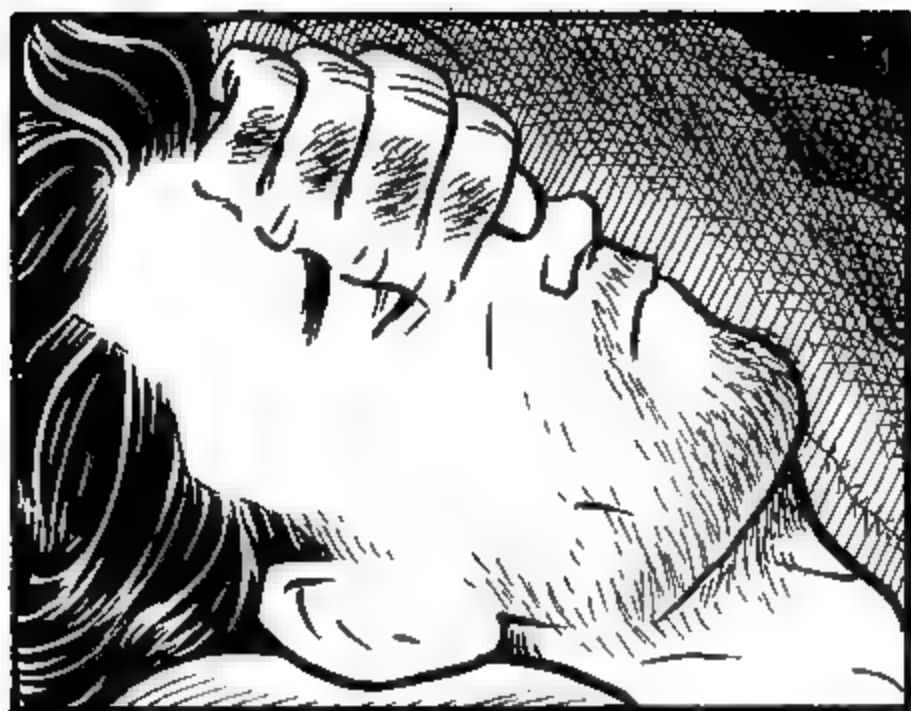


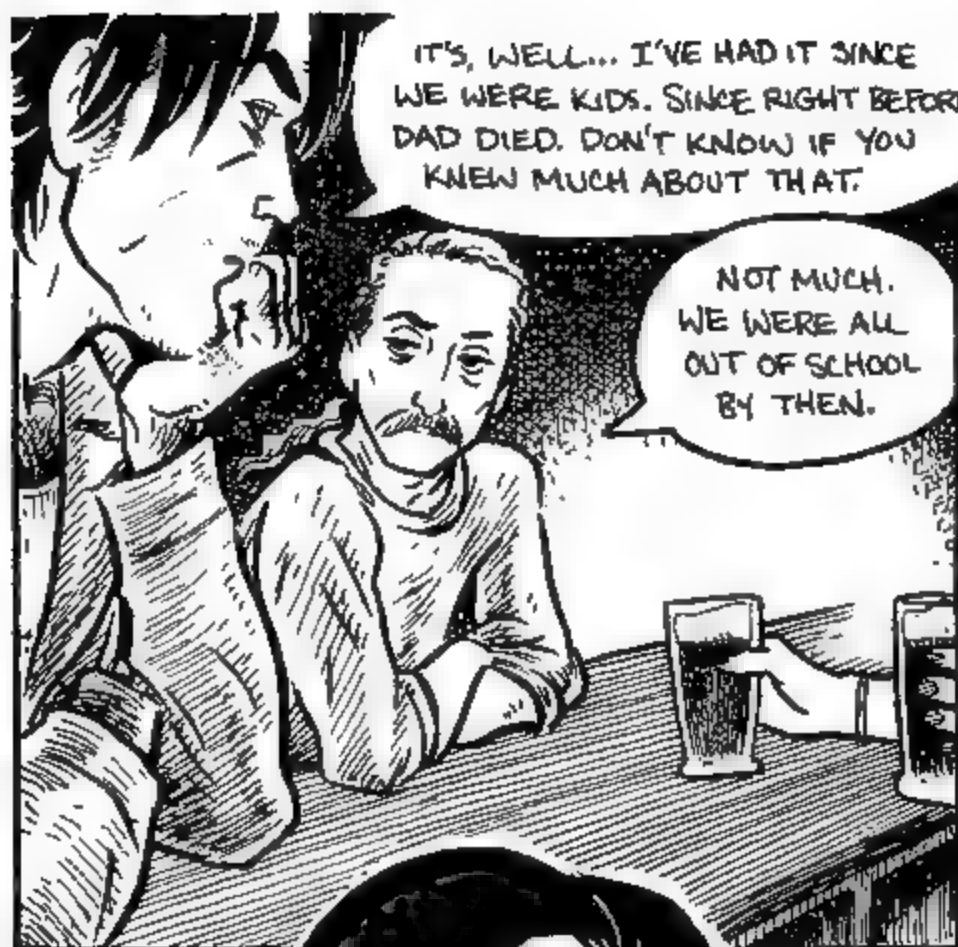
"HE TURNED AWAY
AND THE CLENCH
LET ME GO. "





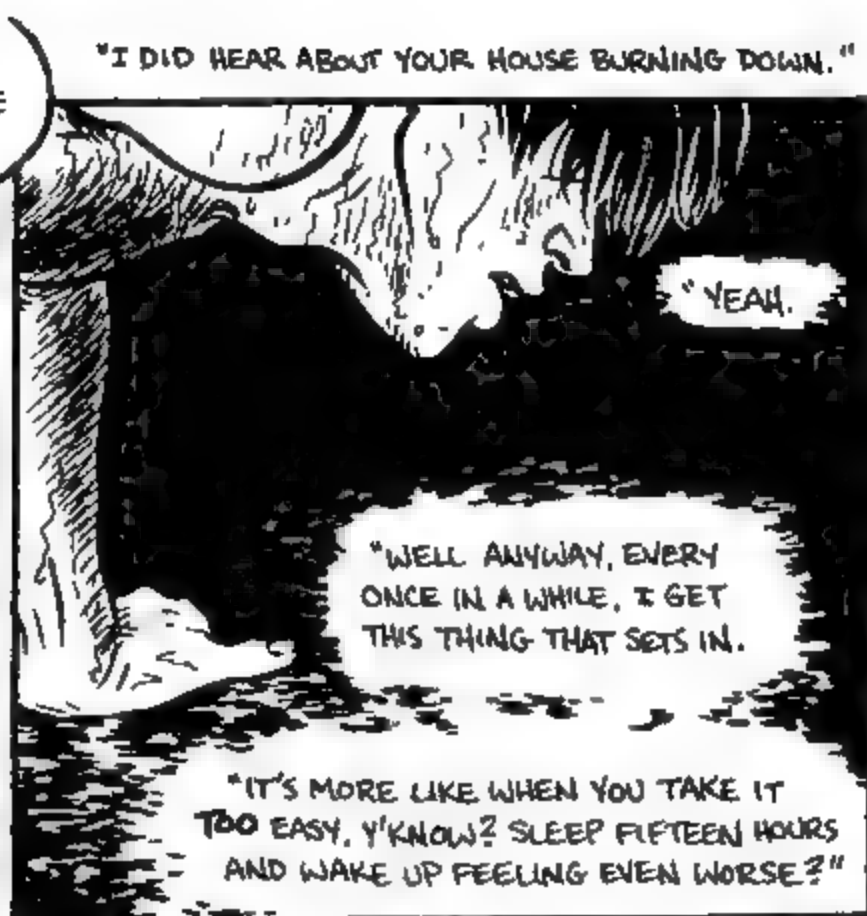






IT'S, WELL... I'VE HAD IT SINCE WE WERE KIDS. SINCE RIGHT BEFORE DAD DIED. DON'T KNOW IF YOU KNEW MUCH ABOUT THAT.

NOT MUCH. WE WERE ALL OUT OF SCHOOL BY THEN.



"I DID HEAR ABOUT YOUR HOUSE BURNING DOWN."

"YEAH."

"WELL ANYWAY, EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, I GET THIS THING THAT SETS IN."

"IT'S MORE LIKE WHEN YOU TAKE IT TOO EASY, Y'KNOW? SLEEP FIFTEEN HOURS AND WAKE UP FEELING EVEN WORSE?"



AND YOU FEEL SO BAD, RIGHT, ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS REST, BUT STAYING DOWN IS THE PROBLEM, SO --

"SO WHAT DO YOU DO?"

USUALLY A BLEEDING FIXES IT RIGHT UP.

P00-00-HOOR..

BAY-AY-AABY..



A BLEEDING.

"YEAH."

AND YOU HADN'T DONE THIS BY THIS POINT BECAUSE .. ?



EH...

JUST KEPT TELLING MYSELF I COULD PUT UP WITH THE LESSER SYMPTOMS IF THEY GOT HER HOT.

"I'D BEEN WITH
HER BEFORE.
REMEMBER.

"WASN'T LIKE THAT,
I CAN TELL YA.

"GRAZIE,"
SHE'S--"

"NEVAEH, STOP.
JUST STOP. I KNOW
YOU MEAN WELL, BUT--

"-- YOU'RE TALKING
ABOUT ONE PERSON
MOST OF US KNOW,
AND ANOTHER THAT
SOME OF US KNOW.
TWO PEOPLE."

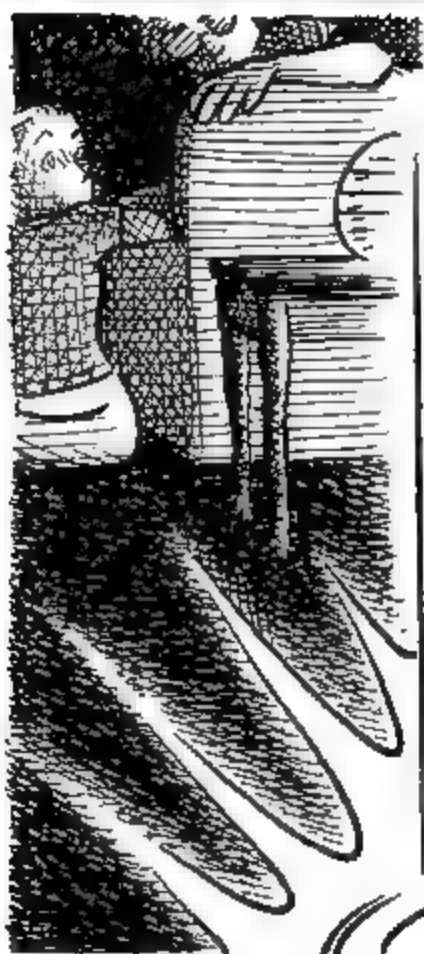
"YOU ARE
SPEAKING IN GROSS
GENERALITIES WITH NO
FACTS, WHICH IS HOW THIS
WHOLE THING GOT BLOWN OUT
OF PROPORTION IN THE
FIRST PLACE. YOU--"

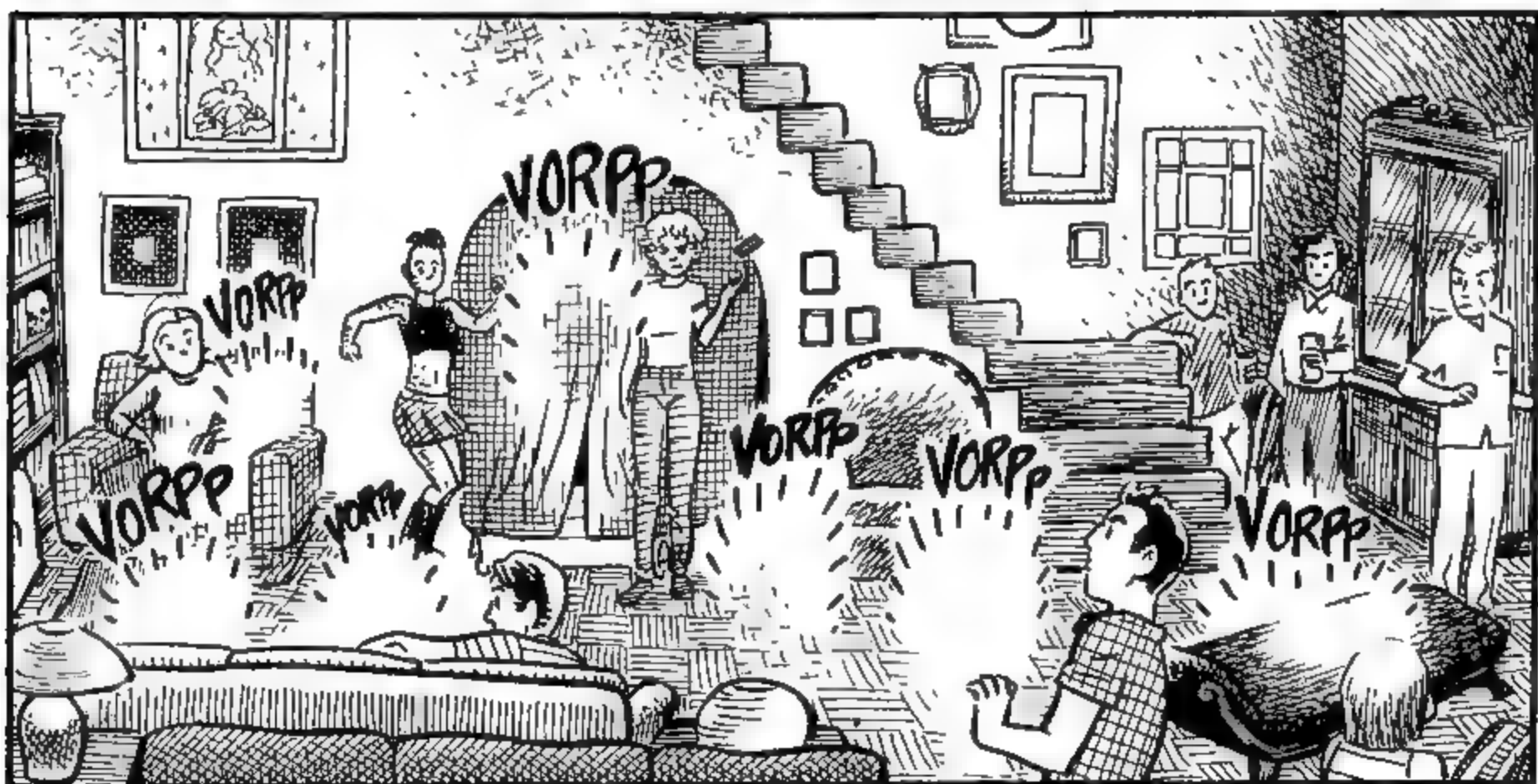
BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION??

HE **STRUCK** HER, THAT'S A FACT! HE PUT HIS
HANDS ON HER IN A **VIOLENT WAY!** IF IT WERE
ME IN THAT SITUATION, I WOULD DO **ANYTHING**
I **HAD TO** TO DEFEND MYSELF, AND I **STAND**
BY THAT TO MY **DYING BREATH!**

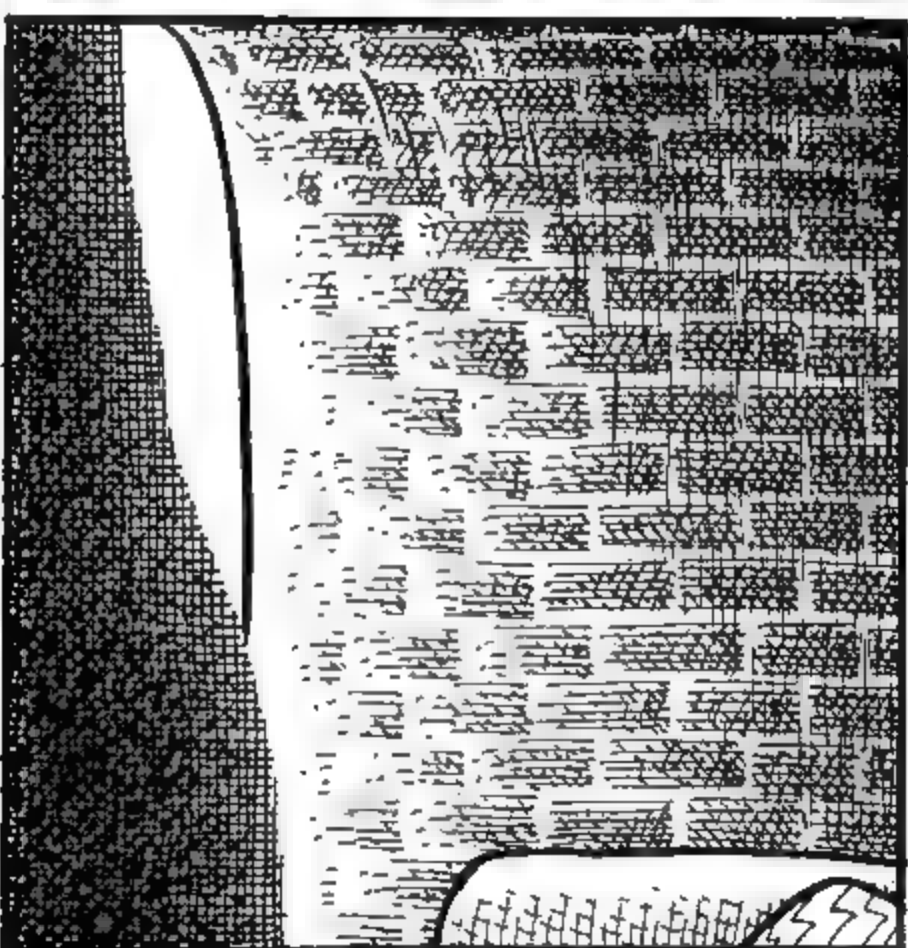
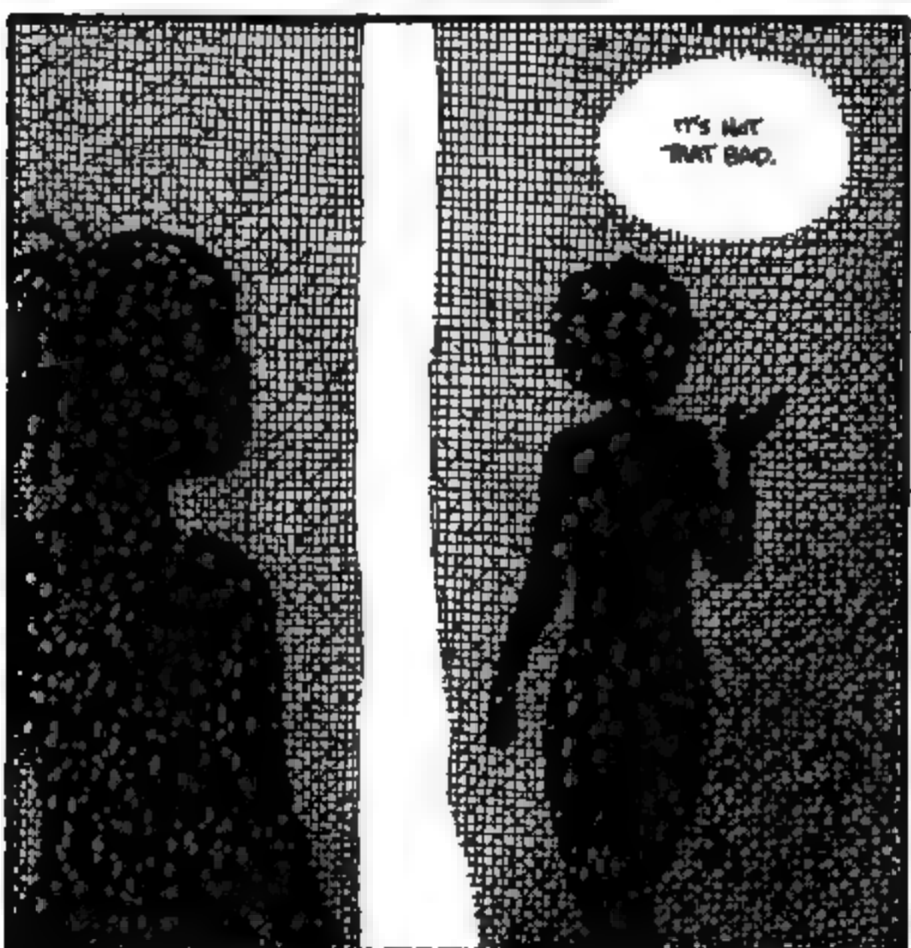
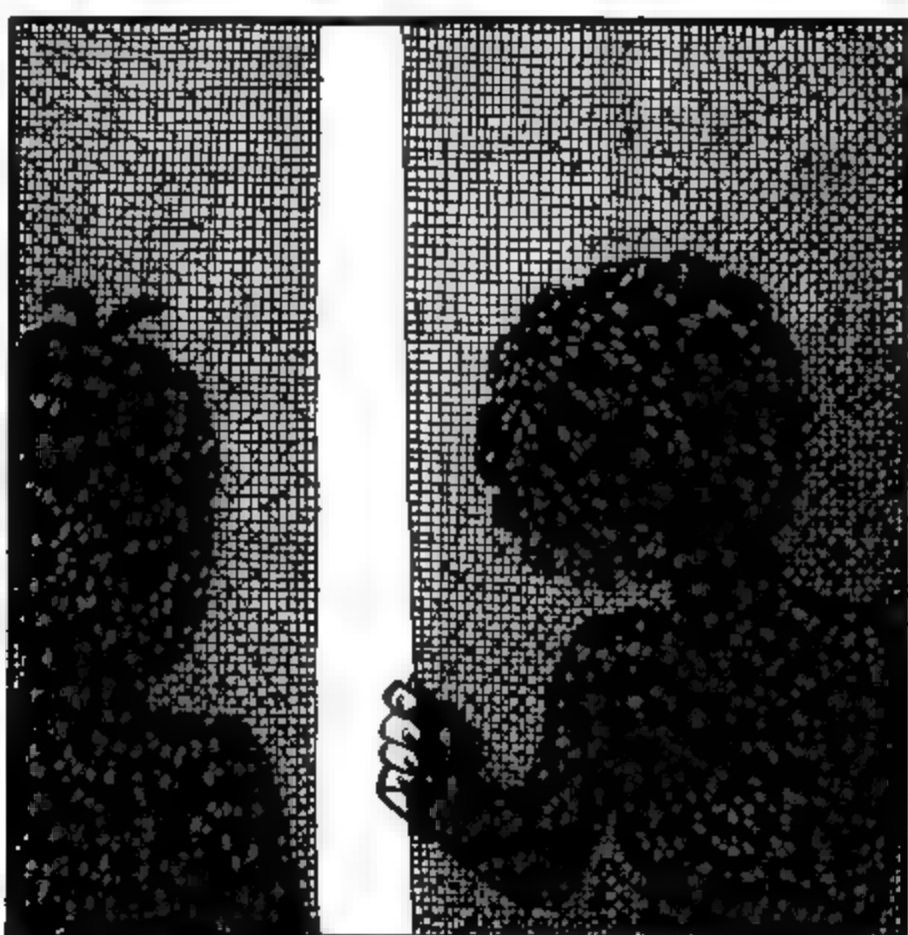
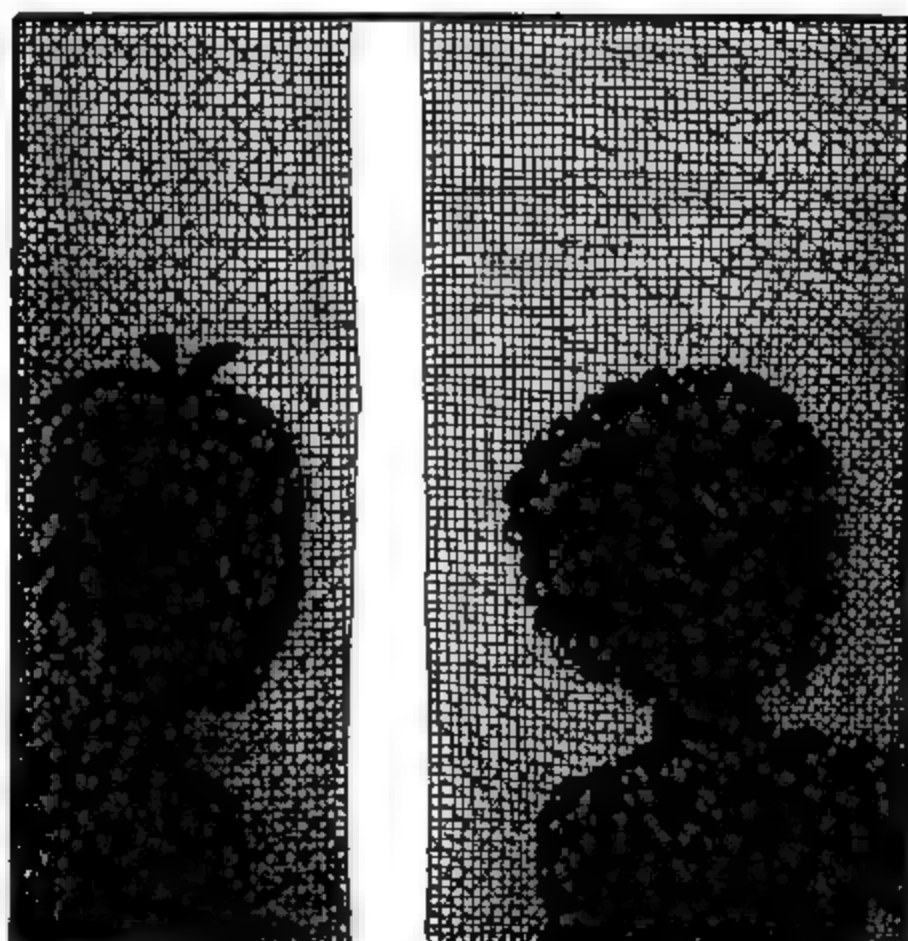
NEVAEH, HE
SMACKED HER ASS
AT A COOK OUT.

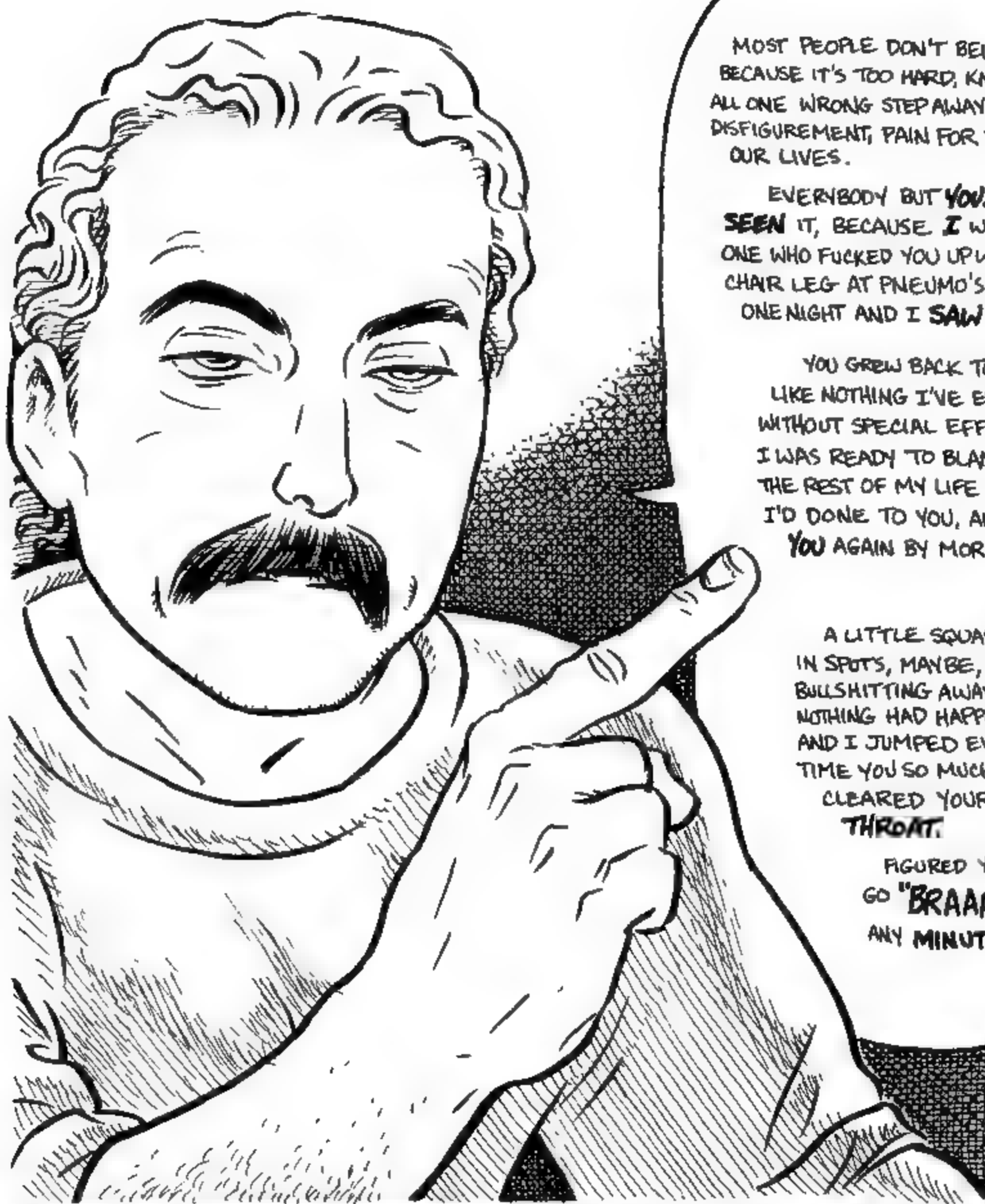
YOU EVER BEEN
IN THAT SITUATION?











MOST PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE IT, BECAUSE IT'S TOO HARD, KNOWING WE'RE ALL ONE WRONG STEP AWAY FROM DEATH, DISFIGUREMENT, PAIN FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.

EVERYBODY BUT **YOU**. I'VE **SEEN** IT, BECAUSE **I** WAS THE ONE WHO FUCKED YOU UP WITH THE CHAIR LEG AT PNEUMO'S THAT ONE NIGHT AND I **SAW** IT.

YOU GREW BACK TOGETHER LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN WITHOUT SPECIAL EFFECTS. HERE I WAS READY TO BLAME MYSELF THE REST OF MY LIFE FOR WHAT I'D DONE TO YOU, AND YOU WERE **YOU** AGAIN BY MORNING.

A LITTLE SQUASHY IN SPOTS, MAYBE, AND BULLSHITTING AWAY LIKE NOTHING HAD HAPPENED, AND I JUMPED EVERY TIME YOU SO MUCH AS CLEARED YOUR **THROAT**.

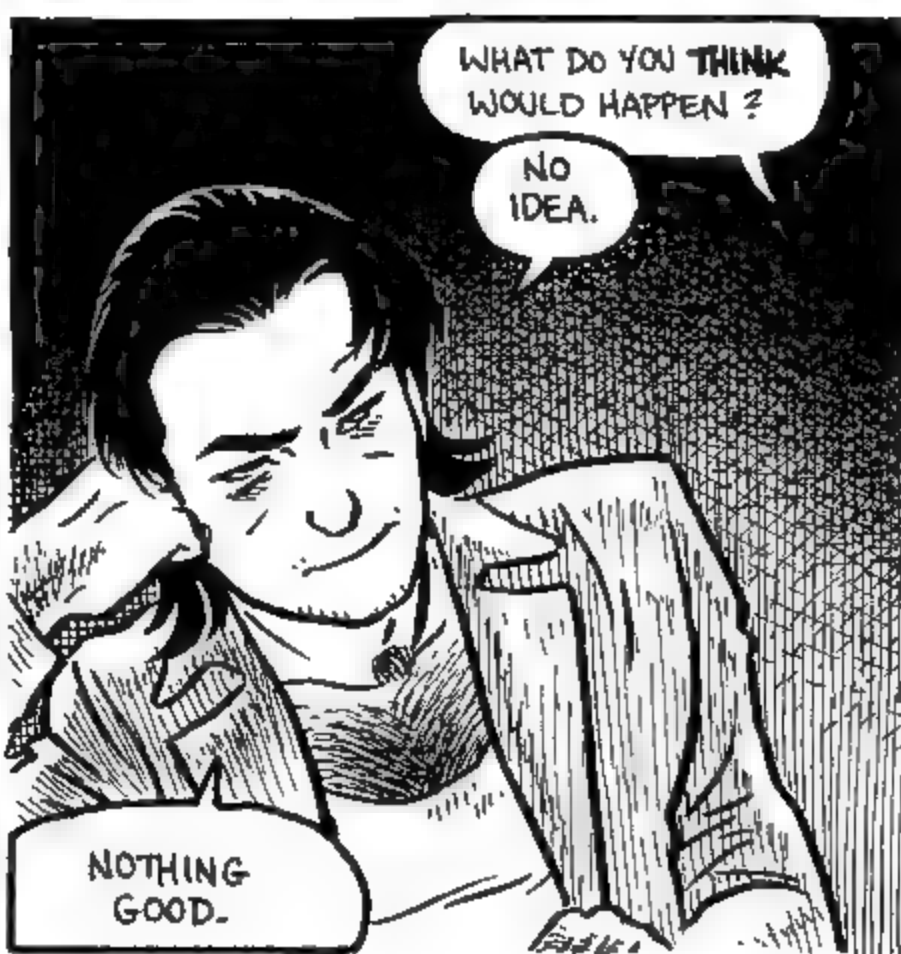
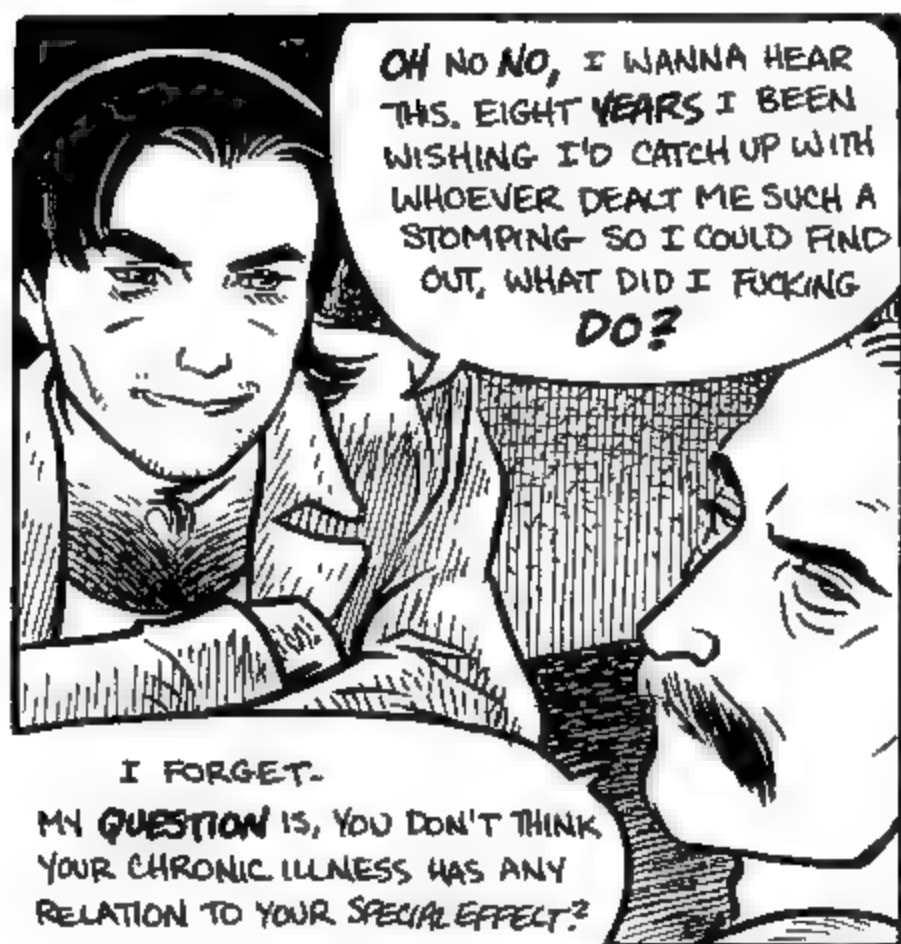
FIGURED YOU'D GO "**BRAAAAINS!**" ANY MINUTE.



WHY YOU BEAT ME WITH A CHAIR LEG, ANYWAY?

WE'RE GETTING OFF THE **SUBJECT** HERE. THE **SUBJECT**.





"BY THAT TIME
ALL I WANTED TO
DO WAS SLEEP.

AND SLEEP.

AND SLEEP.

I HAD LONG SINCE
STOPPED DREAMING.

"I WAS
EMPTY.

GETTING
EMPTIER.

"IF I DIDN'T
GET UP

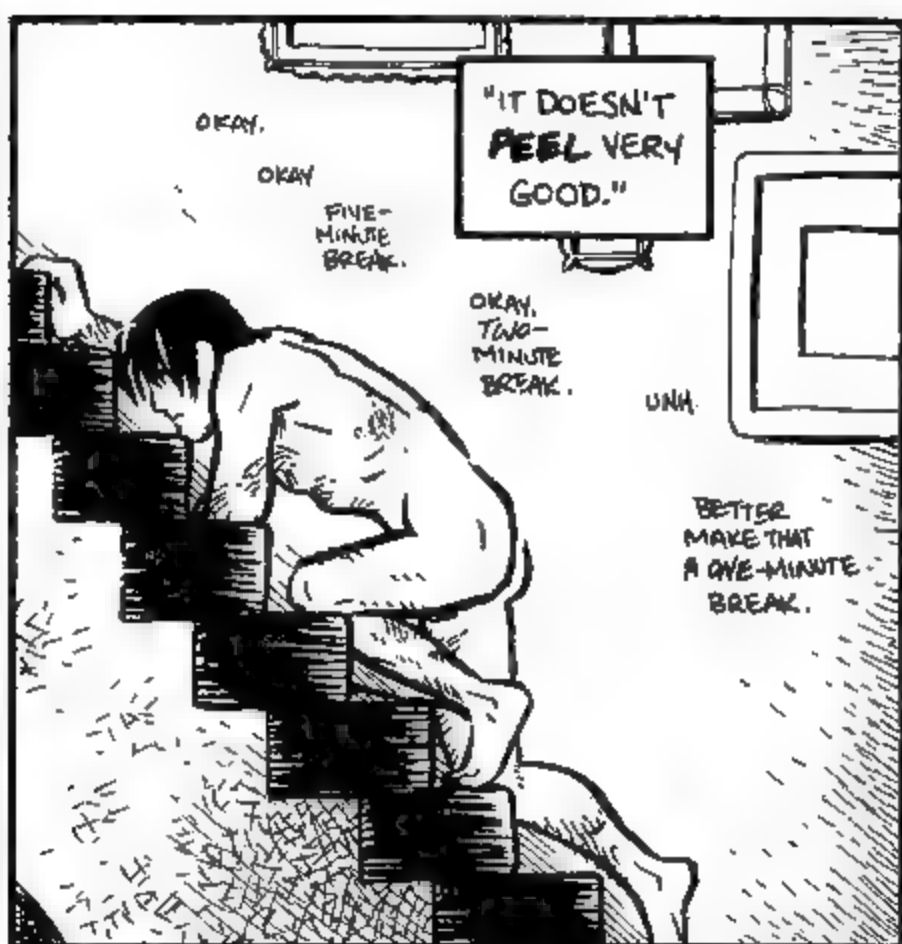
I COULD
FEEL IT



I WOULD NOT
BE GETTING UP.



"SEE, MY...
'SPECIAL
EFFECT.'"



OKAY.

OKAY

FIVE-
MINUTE
BREAK.

"IT DOESN'T
PEEL VERY
GOOD."

OKAY,
TWO-
MINUTE
BREAK.

UHH.

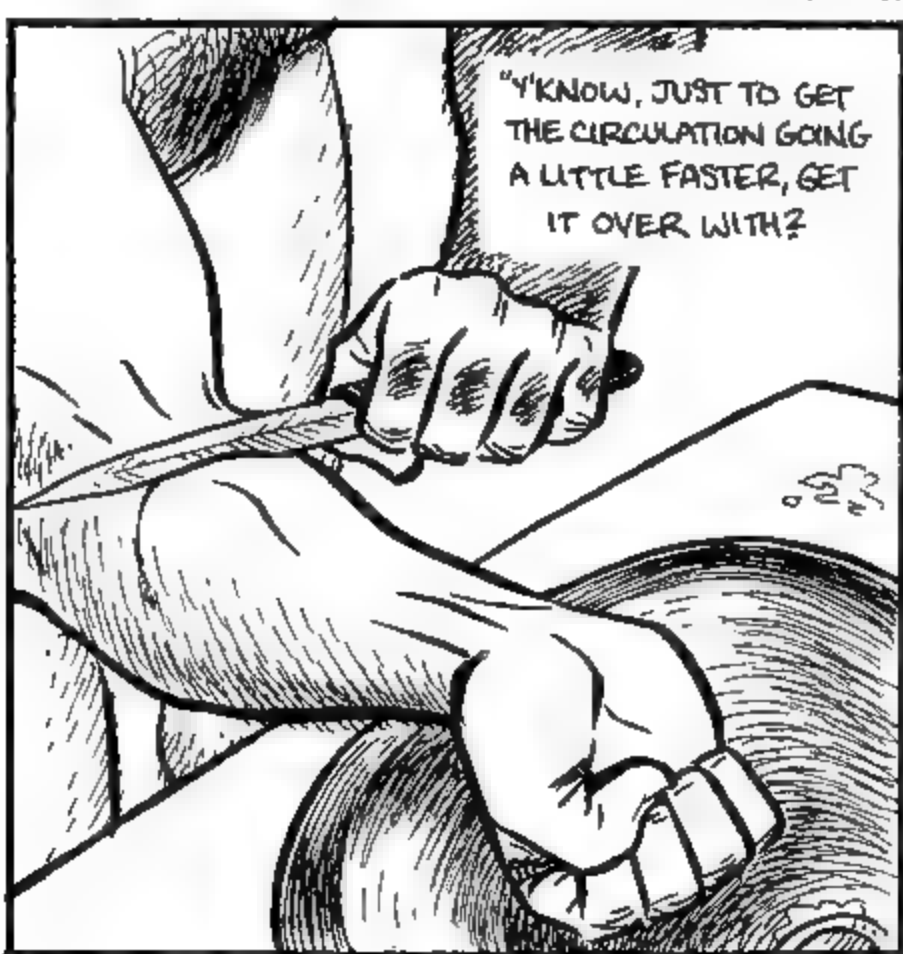
BETTER
MAKE THAT
A ONE-MINUTE
BREAK.



"DIDTA EVER HAVE YOUR WHOLE
LEG FALL ASLEEP? GET PINS AND
NEEDLES ALL OVER A BIG MUSCLE?"



"DIDN'T IT MAKE YOU
WANT TO JUMP AND
FLAIL AND SCREAM
YOUR HEAD OFF?"



"Y'KNOW, JUST TO GET
THE CIRCULATION GOING
A LITTLE FASTER, GET
IT OVER WITH?"



"THAT'S WHAT
IT'S LIKE."

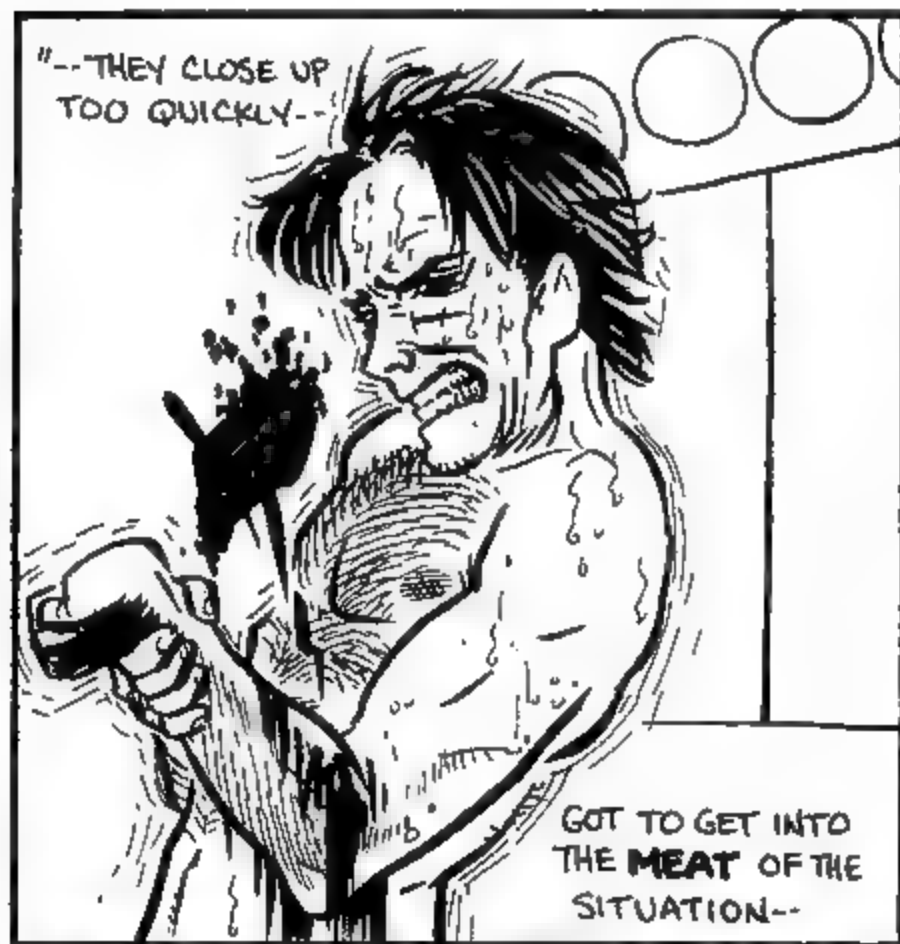
"EXCEPT,
Y'KNOW."

"A LITTLE
MORE SO."



"BUT THE BITCH
OF IT IS--

-- I CAN'T JUST
OPEN A VEIN--



"--THEY CLOSE UP
TOO QUICKLY--

GOT TO GET INTO
THE **MEAT** OF THE
SITUATION--



"MORE IT
HURTS--

THE MORE
I BURN



"SO SOMETIMES

THINGS
JUST
GET



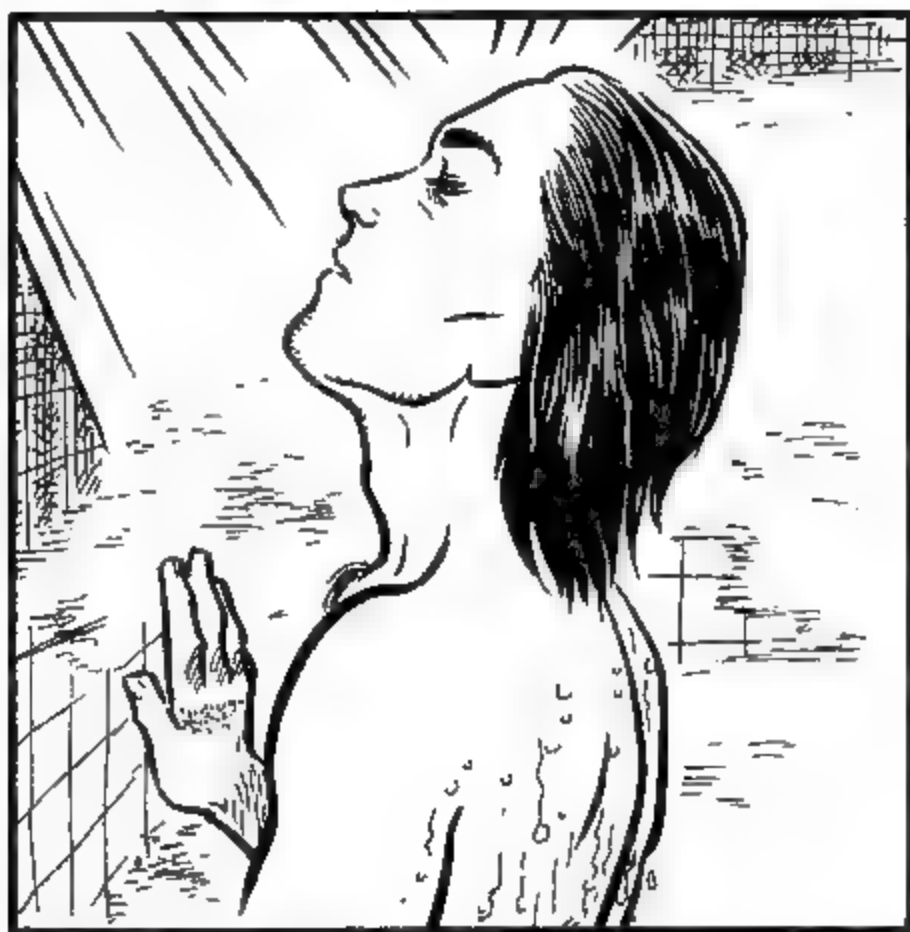
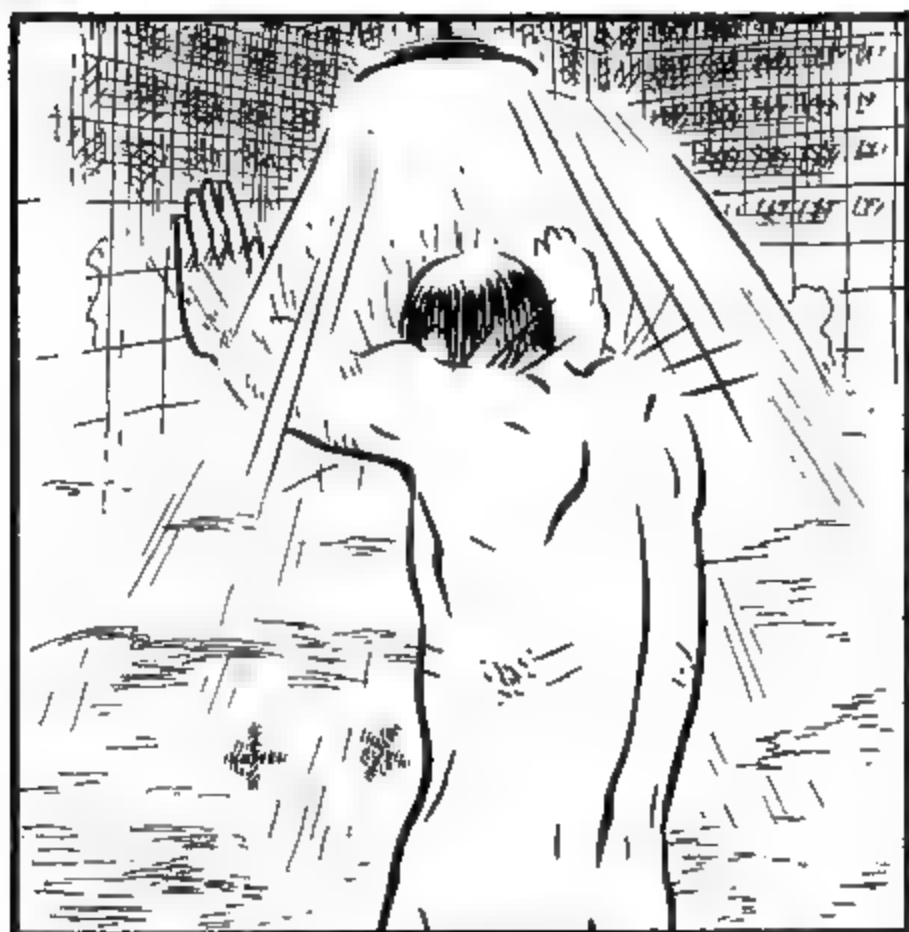
"--LIL' BIT
CRAZY--"

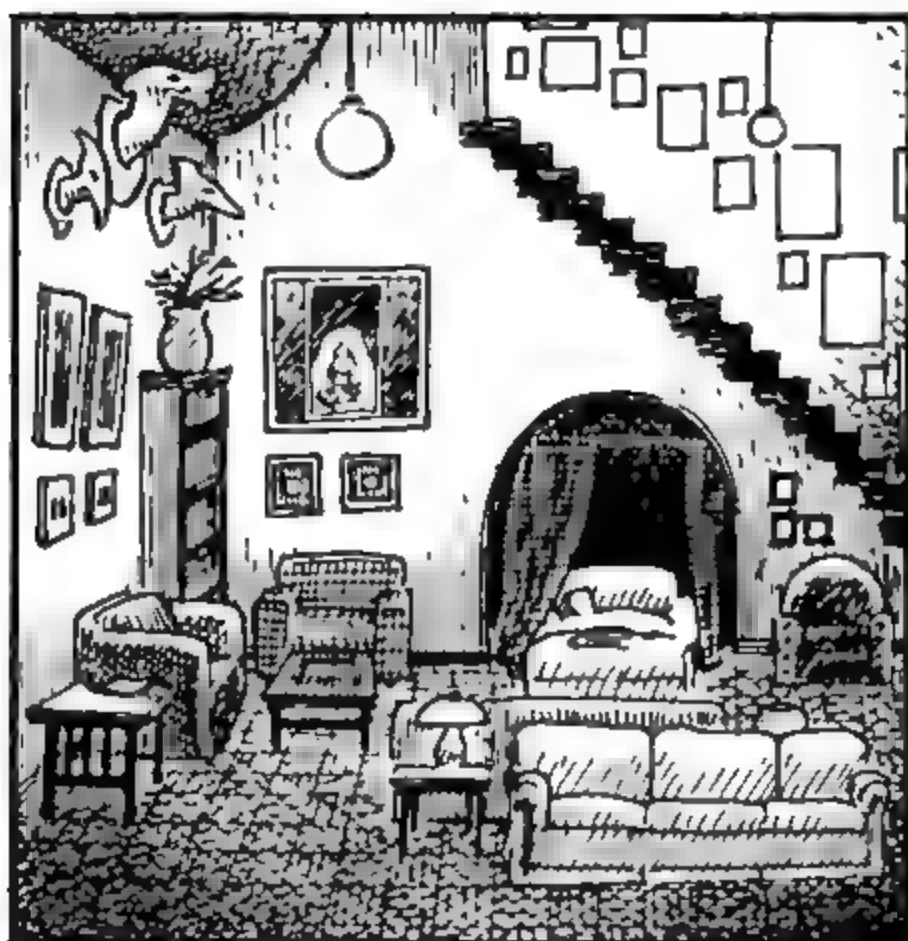


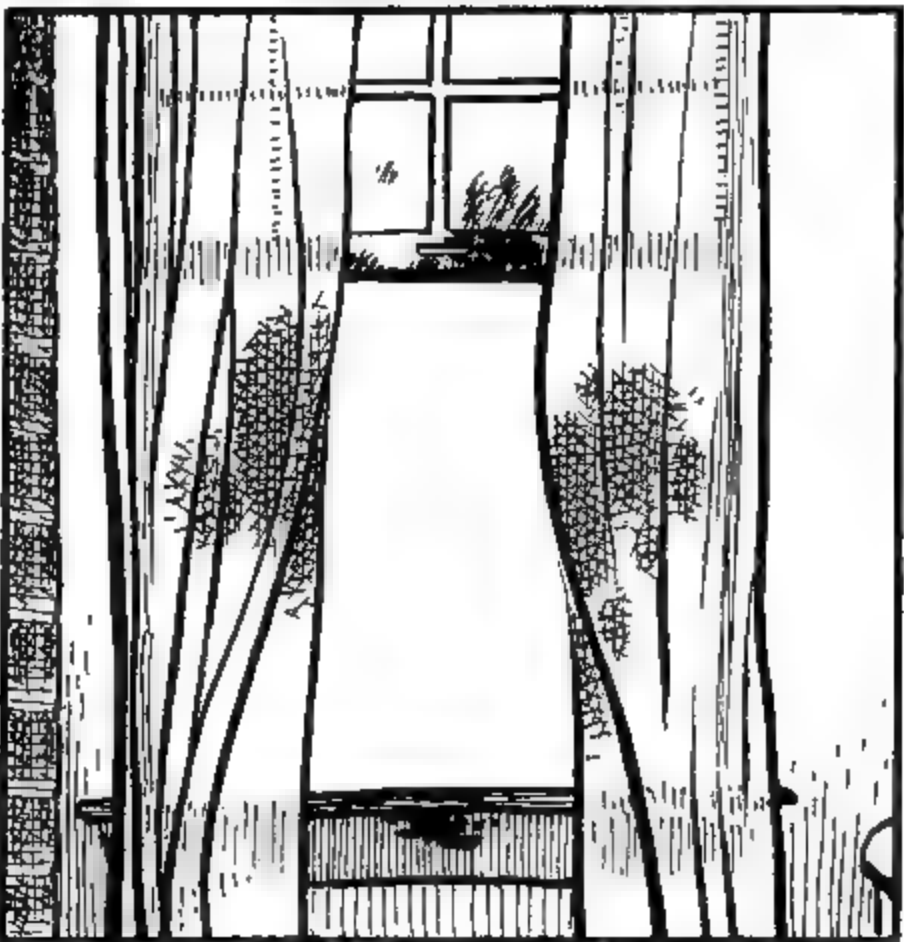
SNAP.

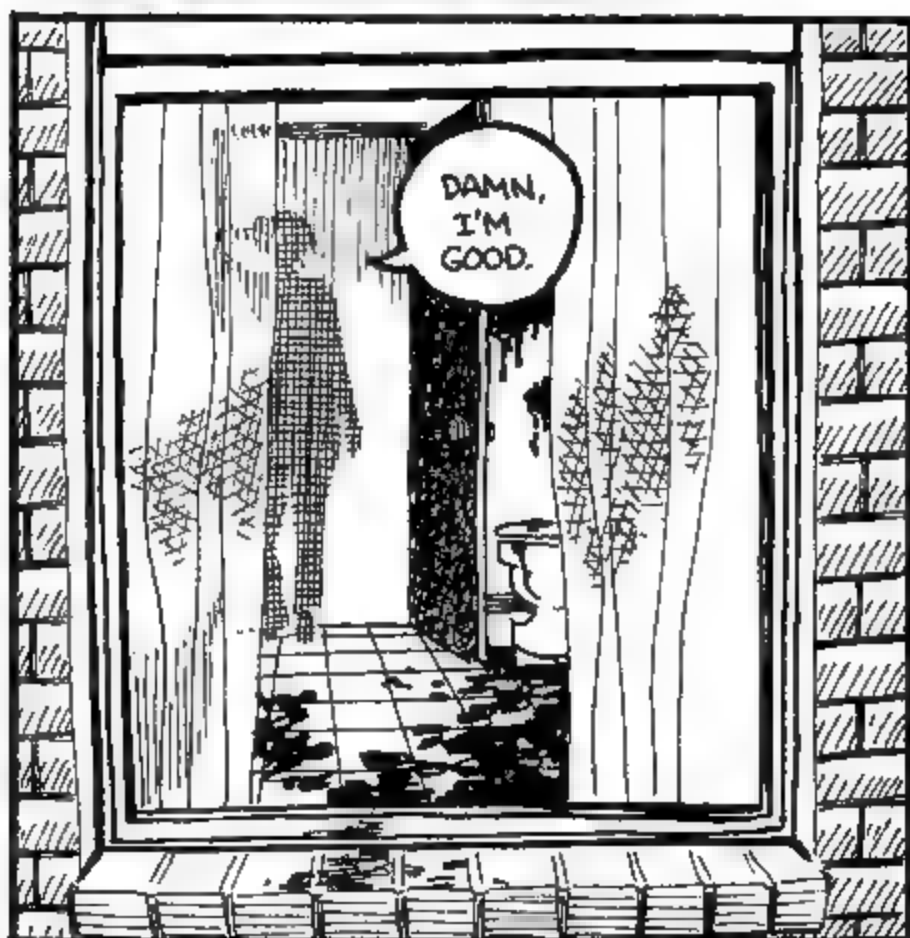
HUH?

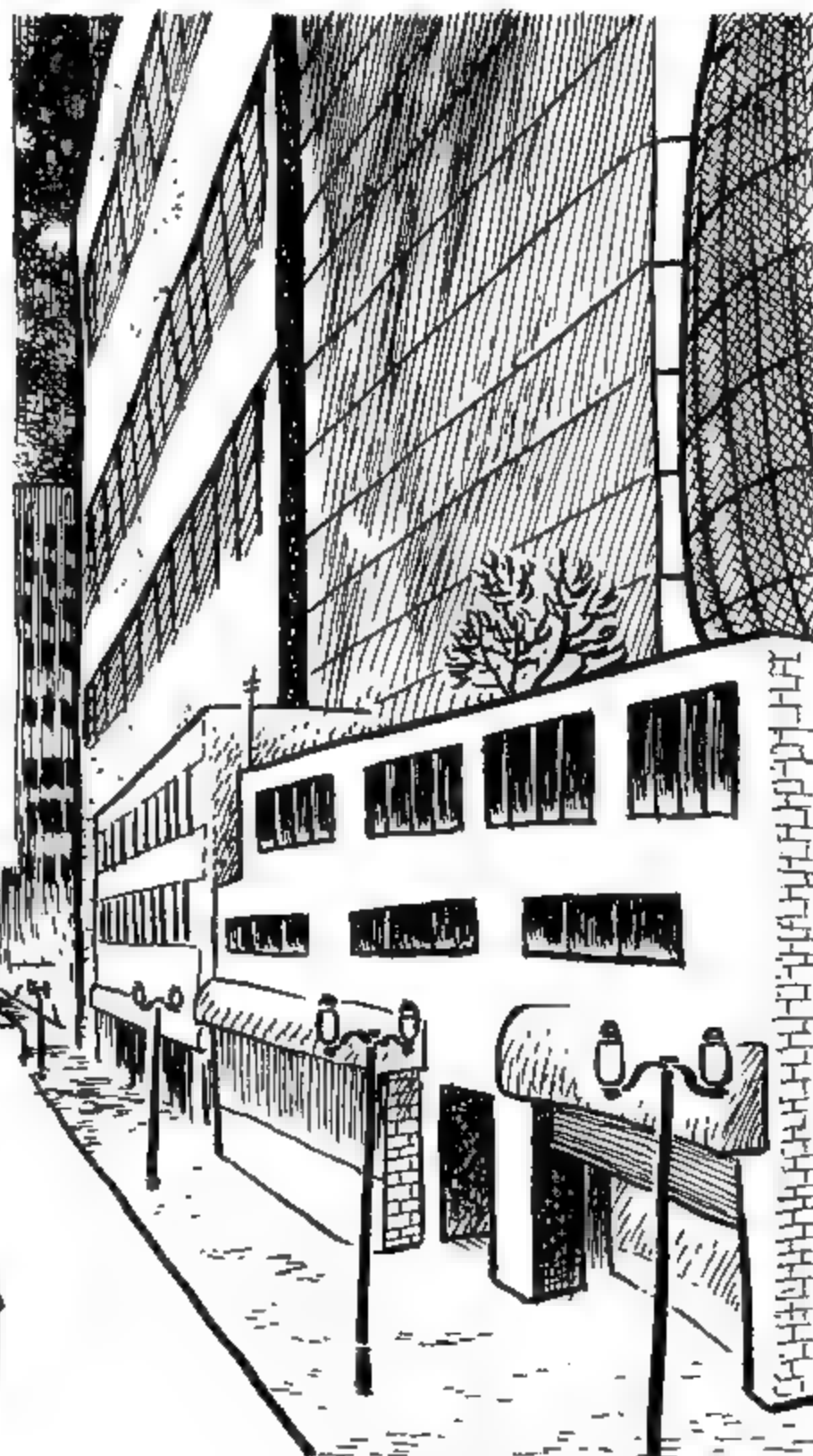
THERE'S A TIP-OVER
POINT WITH THAT TOO.
A CRAZY EQUILIBRIUM.



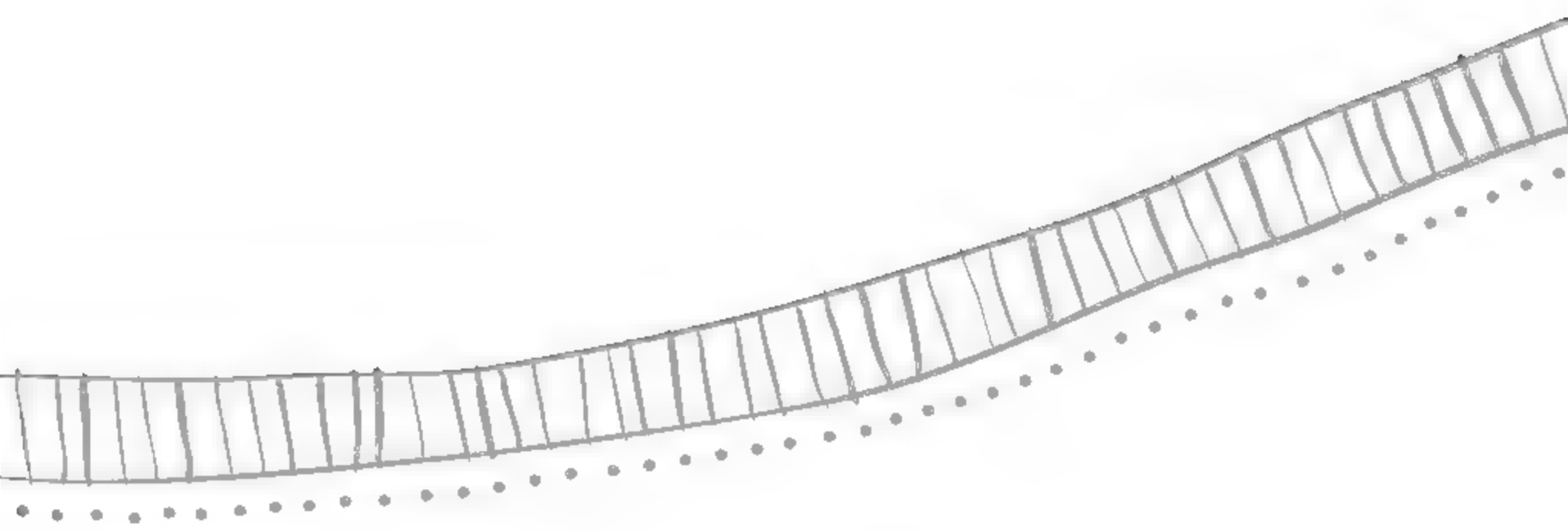








FINISHED JUNE 18 2006
CARIA SPEED MCNEIL



NOTES

DREAM SEQUENCE

CHAPTER ONE

PAGES 15 AND 16

We've seen Blythe before, in *Finder: Sin-Eater*. She's an animated personal organizer. With enough processing power behind her, she becomes a super-secretary.

PAGE 17

This page is taken from a Maxfield Parrish painting. He's best known for his girl-on-rock paintings, lyrical things with lots of flowing hair and drapery, but later in life he focused more on landscapes. Rock without girl, I suppose. He used a meticulous glazing technique to capture the glorious luminosity of twilight, a thing that black-and-white line art can't even touch, but it's the tranquility and peace of the image I hoped would translate.

I hope that it is clear from the outset that Magri's "hair" is actually a mass of wires. He is plugged in like nobody else.

The harness he's wearing on page 16 is supposed to help him with his bad back. He doesn't exercise.

PAGES 18 AND 19

Ayo was meant to represent the bad side of being a media junkie. He's obsessed with the things he loves and wants to live in them, to the extent that he doesn't value being awake in his own life. I probably should have shown the reader many examples of people like Ayo instead of sticking so much to him, but he has a goony charm. He took over the slot.

The idea of the dream sequencer is based on an old horror-movie standby. At the peak of the action, all the characters and settings will sort of flow together in a nightmarish way, a sort of cinematic nervous breakdown. Alan Moore did this from time to time in *Swamp Thing*—throw all the characters into a dream with a lot of punlike verbal connections drawn between them to reinforce what's been going on and give hints as to what's coming. As a regulator of mental health, it's based on the idea that the purpose of dreams is to sort and tabulate experience into long term memory. As we see, it's not always terribly effective.

Burning banana equals fear of sexuality? Or fear of STDs? Either way, it's a good duh-huh Freudian image.

PAGE 20

Ayo's image within the virtual world is one he has chosen. It takes a long time and a good neural-interface jack to create a "golem" that gives you full sensory input—that is to say, as much or more sensation than you'd experience in real life. It also takes some time to be able to create and maintain a mental image of yourself that looks like you. A simple student jack creates a golem as simple as a six-line caricature, and that can only see and hear. Ayo's is extremely sophisticated.

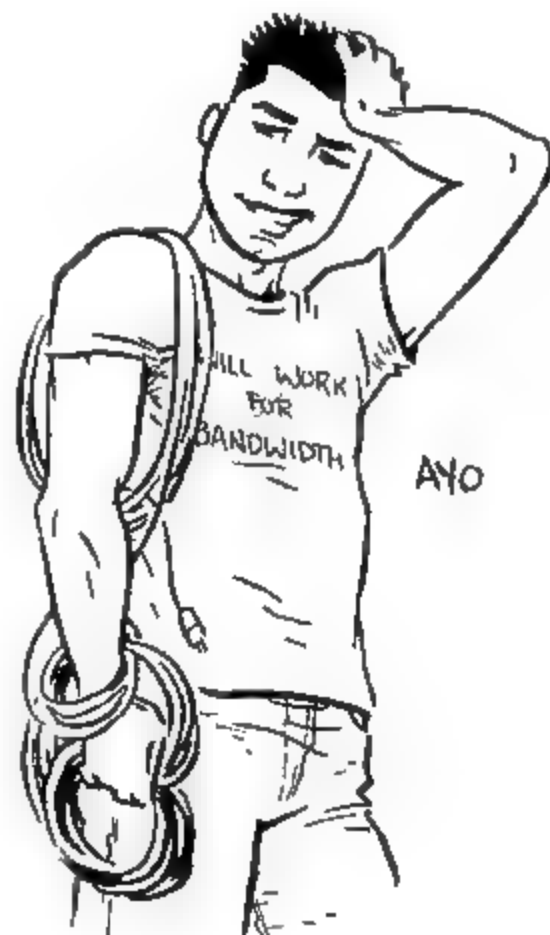
PAGE 21

Pedestrian rush-hour traffic is gruesome in most of the big domed cities.

It's not that the inhabitants of this city never have weather. The enclosed spaces are enough that water vapor can form clouds and sometimes rain. But there isn't enough space for real thunderheads to build up—and huge air regulators to prevent big clouds of any kind—so the residents rarely feel the real power of the sky.

PAGE 22

I miss the spectacular anvil clouds of southern Louisiana. That green storm light was something I grew up with. Magri extrapolates everything in his dream world from things he sees. He's just an eye. He has even less of a life than Ayo.





PAGE 23

Blythe runs interference. It's not that Magri is such a sleepwalker that it would hurt him to be disturbed while he's observing something. This is just part of his self-imposed artist's mystique.

Magri's never seen most of these things either. But he understands how to set a mood. The imaginations of the visitors do the rest. The contribution of the visitors is not a thing he or anyone else notices or understands.

PAGE 24

The cubicle farm's ultimate form. I've never worked in one, but the way my friends who do describe their offices' surreptitious changing of shape and location and size according to the perceived popularity of the project they're working on is enough to creep me out for days on end.

PAGE 25

Lots of people in this society engage in strange forms of multiple marriage. It's more like joining a company as a partner among other partners than the basic pair-bond legal contract we're familiar with. It's a way of pooling resources and getting tax breaks.

PAGE 26

Down in the lower left corner, that's meant to be Indiana Jones. Ssshhh. Don't tell anybody.

PAGE 27

"Skull in a bridal veil" and "clown with an erection" are shorthand for "nightmare." This kind of aphoristic image is a pretty useful storytelling tool.

Panel 3. This is supposed to hint to the reader that Magri's parents are actually dead. Elsewhere takes place inside his mind. If Magri didn't make such an effort to ignore his visitors they'd be running into his memories of them everywhere. They stumble over his memories of other people and mistake them for visitors all the time.

Magri's idea of being an embodiment of a place is my homage to Neil Gaiman's character Gilbert, the personification of Fiddler's Green in *The Sandman*.

PAGE 28

This is a real dream that sneaked out of Ayo's psyche when he wasn't paying attention. That's why he didn't get an analysis of it.

The hordes of hundreds of people bumping around outside is an image from the old *Star Trek*, actually. I'm no episode scholar; I don't know which one it was, but Kirk found himself on an abandoned *Enterprise*, alone except for this weird girl. She was supposed to catch a disease from him and go back to her horribly overcrowded planet. A Mendelian solution to overcrowding, to be sure. Anyway, there was a scene or two in which there seemed to be hundreds and hundreds of people walking in tiny steps on these endless ramps outside the ship. Scared the whiz out of me at age five.

PAGE 29

Many people describe dramatic points in their lives as feeling as if they have been drawn into a story. I wonder if this is true at the time, or whether it's the end result of trying to tell the story afterward.

Panel 2. This is Marcie's first walk-on in *Dream Sequence*.

PAGES 30-31

Jaeger has always been kind of a shifty thing in my mind. He wasn't even remotely human when I was very young. He solidified as a man in my teens. But he tends to take on his old shape-shifter self in fiction-within-fiction in *Finder*.

PAGE 32

The old shtick about being killed in a dream causing the dreamer's death is what I'm playing with here, obviously. Attack in the virtual world upon one's golem can produce cognitive dissonance between the brain and the body, the senses and the brain's interpretation of them. The level of complexity of the neural jack and the golem determines how badly the operator can be hurt.

The fact that Ayo doesn't recognize his shift in perception is a pretty common thing. He can't see his problem for the same reason that people in Times Square cannot see America.

PAGES 33 AND 34

I was saving Magni's face for this page. He really has no idea that this round black mask appears on the face of his golem.

His expression on page 29 is that of the butler who comes downstairs one morning and finds a corpse dismembered in the foyer. His first thought is not "How ghastly" but "I will never be able to get that stain out of the woodwork." Shock is like that.

I had Magni's hair float when he's in Elsewhere to emphasize his airy spirit and detachment. Chester Brown did this with his angels in his Gospel adaptations.

CHAPTER TWO

PAGES 39 AND 40

There are conversations roiling around in my head that are years old. Some of them I'd like to get rid of. Others I've written into stories. Magni doesn't have any outlet for them. The only way he can shut them up is to concentrate on creating his mental images of places and things. It's a form of self-hypnosis.

PAGE 41

One might think that, inside his own mind, Magni would be free to dance if he wanted to. He's still constrained by his own image. Everything that he wants to do is funneled into his work. Nothing gets out.

PAGE 42

His visitors are watching him make magic; Sylvans are obsessed with the idea of magic. They spend inordinate amounts of money researching paranormal abilities and encouraging their children to think in magical terms. It's a large part of their cultural identity. Magni is viewed as a wonderful role model.

PAGE 43

These people are all Sylvans. They admire and revere Magni. They are also businessmen. They hate being dependent on him. Luckily for them, he's too out of it to take command.

PAGE 44

I went to Disney World once. I saw an exhibit in which something like a ball of cameras was

thrown over Niagara Falls. The screens created a 360-degree image, cleverly engaging the viewers' peripheral vision, enhancing the *you are there* feeling. I seem to recall some sort of squirt gun that shot spray over the audience's heads. All this, so you could have the experience of going over Niagara Falls in a barrel without risking your life.

Or damaging the environment, I suppose.

Diverting. Sure. But it still rather misses the point. Years later when I encountered the virtual-reality cyberpunk brain-jack idea, I knew it was the same idea taken to its logical extreme . . . but the *nsks* there are powerful, and amazingly well hidden.

That's what I was thinking of when I wrote this story. That, and *Riven*, which is probably the only computer game I've ever played all the way through. Really bad story; terrible acting. But the environment was just fascinating, and when the game was over, I was sorry, because I had no excuse to wander around in the world anymore.

Third and final element: world building in general. I've seen so, so many people who build exhaustively detailed worlds and then can never write stories set in them, because the details take the place of characters. The diurnal cycle, moon phases, wildlife, constellations, seasonal extremes, tribal names, costumes, customs, and everything else . . . It's so easy to get bogged down. That's why I depict Magni as endlessly elaborating a place but without any desire to create characters to populate it and do things. It's also why all these details end up in the back of the book.



PAGE 45

Yeah, Stilwater's a bit of a bastard. A *big* bit. But Magni's such a flake that he can't really be a partner. It's difficult to be anything but a user around a guy that creative and that passive.

The main thing here is that there are plenty of

virtual environments, but they're all maintained by machines. Elsewhere is unique in that it's all inside Magri. If you asked his visitors what's so special about Elsewhere, they'd fumble for words, but say things like, "It's so alive." They'd talk about how it never seems fake or like a stage set, that it feels like a real place; real and limitless.

PAGES 46 AND 47

These people will emerge from their web-surfing session with all kinds of strange things wrong with them. Temporal-lobe seizures can have bizarre cognitive effects. Oliver Sacks's case studies in neurology are always interesting to read if you want more.

PAGE 48

What's with the hair? Just to show Magri's growing lack of control over his own environment. That pose in the third panel is one I cribbed from an early chapter of *Mal, the Psychic Girl*.

PAGE 49

Ayo, reduced to hapless pretzel. He can see, but that's all. The monster has an ugly sense of justice.

The idea came down from an early episode of Bill Messner-Loebs's wonderful *Journey*, in which Wolverine MacAlistaire and his wizardly friend conjure up the ghost of a dead man whose skull and crucifix they find in a sycamore tree. They want to know how he died. He's just a skull on a stick with a shirt and his crucifix, but the way the panels are composed implies life in an inanimate object. It's brilliant. Go read *Journey*.

PAGE 50

It's not that Ayo's skills are that valuable. The jack itself makes him a valuable employee. All the medical care is necessary for the maintenance of the jack.

It's the jack that makes the job.

PAGE 51

This test, and Ayo's reaction to it, are here to show that he's way off the beam and spiraling out of control. The medical officer has two wire sensors not unlike Magri's. These aren't uncommon, though very expensive.

PAGES 52 AND 53

There is no way to tell what's causing Ayo to have these temporal-lobe seizures, which in turn cause him to see people's faces and bodies in this warped way. A quirk of the brain also causes his inability to perceive them. The seizure activity

can be tracked, but not traced to a cause. It's not as if anybody's been hitting him with a hammer. He doesn't have to go back into Elsewhere to have another seizure; since his golem resides inside his head, its knotted-up signals can trigger them at any time. The medical officer can recalibrate his golem so that it can better approximate Ayo's self-image, but that's more like routing around damage than untying the knots. In effect, he's a man with no hands learning to eat with his feet.

PAGE 54

Magri can rival a Southern belle when his denial-deflector shield is all the way up. "I'm sorry, sugah, did you say something? I was lookin' somewhere else."

PAGE 55

Ayo's lazy as hell. And incredibly insecure.

PAGES 56 AND 57

Tests reveal the seizure activity. But it's impossible to trace it to a specific physical event. It's the perfect crime.

It's not that Stilwater doesn't care about the welfare of other people. He's very polite to people he meets in the street. He just has a hard time remembering that people he's not face to face with are people

PAGE 58

Magri's losing wires left and right (Well, mostly right. He is experiencing seizure activity on the right side, too). By the end of this he'll be practically bald.

CHAPTER THREE

PAGE 63

Jaeger's image has been appropriated by the movie industry. He is not making these films himself; a virtual actor was compiled from images of him taken by the researchers in Munkyland back in *Finder: King of the Cats*. Lynne Grosvenor also made a tidy stack of money selling footage of Jaeger he'd compiled to the studio who bought the virtual actor when the Munkyboys sold him to Synapsthesia. Many real actors manage their own images this way for their entire careers, rarely appearing in front of a camera except to be rescreened. Some actors "act" through their virtual images, programming their virtual self as an animator does a 3-D graphic. Others just farm the image out to studios, and spend half their lives litigating against anybody whom they see as stealing

their image. Some families have older virtual actors as family heirlooms.

Poor guy. First thing they did was take off all his body hair.

PAGES 64 AND 65

This is my homage to all the gay guys whose uninhibited pom I have been amused by. Vivat!

I love porno movie titles. Morgan Evans was the male lead in that great Bette Davis movie, *The Corn Is Green*.

Last panel, page 65. That thing around Jaeger's neck is a nasty plastic pig sticker. Invisible to metal detectors, it's a triangular blade that can be sharpened to a damned sharp edge and will make a nasty hole in an assailant.

PAGE 66

It's amazing to me how you can change a character by changing his hair. Jaeger's always changing.

PAGE 67

More headaches and seizures for Magri as he goes into denial of his usual way of denying reality.

PAGE 68

The line that was cut came after "We haven't seen the worst of this yet." Executive blinks. "And that's meant to be reassuring, is it?"

PAGES 69 AND 70

Stilwater told Magri they had nothing to worry about. Now he's sending in the troops to find



out what's really going on. Contradiction? Not to him.

It was with this soldier who thinks he's been beheaded that I started worrying about whether I'd gone too far with the gore. It's very effective . . . but there's only so far back from that I can come, in the context of this story.

Basically this guy can't move, and thinks his body is someone else's that has somehow been stitched to his severed neck stump. This is not an unheard-of problem.

PAGE 71

Magri knows everybody who has been inside his mind, yes. He keeps that knowledge walled from his conscious mind.

PAGE 72

The "dead" guy can't actually talk, except through the medium of Elsewhere.

PAGE 73

This tiny graveyard, bounded on all three sides by busy streets, is based on one I've been past a hundred times in Annapolis, Maryland. It's on one of the busiest streets in town. On occasion I've seen people in their good clothes standing around in it. It has no fence and no privacy.

PAGE 74

I did not realize how much of Magri I owe to a side character from *Gunn/Battle Angel Alita*. Not until I drew him with his hair tied up in this turban shape did it start to knock on the back of my head. Kaos is one big influence on his character, and Colleen Doran's Rieken/Seren from *A Distant Soil* is the other. Neither of these powerful characters occurred to me directly when I designed him. They're easy to see in him just the same.

PAGE 75

The loaded question. The impetus of a conversation. The fear of one's readers, and the cult of originality.

These are the big subtexts of *Dream Sequence*, which should probably have been titled *Elsewhere*, but Will Shetterly has a novel titled *Elsewhere* and Emma Bull has one named *Finder*.

PAGE 76

All ideas are derived. It's what you do with them that counts. But people are sold on the idea of Creation as something that makes them unique. They bite when cornered on the whole "where do you get your ideas" question.



PAGE 77

Interesting comparisons.

The Running Man was the first movie made with the image of Jaeger. *Hellbalzer II* is the latest.

Rosemary's Baby set off a spate of devil-child movies. Devil-child movies run in cycles. I think this has less to do with cyclical baby booms as it has with Hollywood's recycling of ideas.

In *Zorro, the Gay Blade*, George Hamilton plays two brothers. The other brother is this incredibly swishy gay guy, very pretty, and the very image of Donna Barr's Desert Peach. Now, *Pfirsich* is a hundred times more complex a character, but *Bunny Wigglesworth* is more fun than a box of five-legged monkeys. Don't know if that movie influenced Donna, but it's fun to watch.

Dave Sim's *Jaka's Story*, drawn with the poster from *Gypsy*.

PAGE 78

The young hopeful execs, trying to make their mark. Stilwater asked for a scapegoat; they went out and found him one.

PAGE 79

Magri retreats into Elsewhere rather than take charge and tell these hired geeks to let this man go, even though he knows the guy's innocent. Dissociation is something everybody experiences from time to time: just zoning out is dissociation. Magri's dissociative states are much more profound.

PAGES 80–82

The patterns in the stained-glass windows represent states of mind. Magri runs away from the injustice done in his name and lets out his anger where nobody can hear it. He just doesn't realize that that blackness isn't just empty space, and that window's been filling up for a long, long time.

And there's the mouse again. Nope, still don't know. I think it's a projection of Magri's psyche. He's getting tired of being himself.

That, and I was reading Philip Pullman's novels pretty heavily when I wrote this. In those, almost every character has a daemon familiar in animal shape. Little white mouse . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

PAGE 87

Balloony-head dissociation can be fun, if it's controlled, as in meditation. I look forward to this feeling while working out. Magri's much more inclined to go overboard.

PAGES 88 AND 89

. . . And that's how he gets into these situations. Magri, as a public figure, is just as subject to the whims of fandom as a fictional character.

PAGES 90 AND 91

Why an orgy? Why a *two-page* orgy? Well you may ask.

Magri has no privacy, even in his own mind—especially in his own mind. His psychic landscape is open to the public, so that they may visit his fantasy world, Elsewhere. That's good for him, since it makes him a hell of a lot of money. But he can't be said to have "poor boundaries"—he has *no* boundaries. His private life is in no way protected from the public. So this online virtual sex club which roams from server to server has landed on him for the moment, and there's nothing he can do about it.

Why all the extra limbs? This comes from a series of sites I found devoted to a brand-new kink. These sites were full of heavily Photoshopped images of "boytaurs." They start with extra legs and go nuts from there. Lots of fiction about growing extra appendages and to what uses they may be put.

Those folks who were shocked by these images have no idea how easy I went on them. The web contains fetish sites by the thousands that are far, far more bizarre.

PAGE 92

Enter the monster. The mallet was originally

intended to be a croquet mallet, but in the monster's hands it's grown into something more suitable for polo. Appropriate enough, given polo's origins. The fur coat comes from good old Tyler Durden.

PAGE 93

Magni's hair isn't *hair*. It's composed of very fine cables that act as wireless antennae, so that the public can access Elsewhere while Magni moves about freely. They're very sophisticated implants, which his body is rapidly rejecting for the first time in his life.

PAGES 94 AND 95

In this world, there's a lot more fighting over copyrights and money derived from copyrights. On the shelf at the bookstore, you might find eight different books with the same title. One of them may be the original. The rest will be other authors' versions of the same book, or entirely different books that just share the same name, edited versions, bowdlenized versions, multimedia presentations, movies that started off as the original or derived novel but rapidly evolved into something completely different . . . and so on. And absolutely no one agrees about which of the eight is really the best. Keep browsing; they're all like that.

All these fragmentary conversations are things I've overheard or read, cut to fit.

BENCH BUMS



The "perfect quote" in panel 5, page 95, belongs to Salvador Dali. The story about the muse being sued comes from Batton Lash's *Supernatural Law*.

PAGE 96

When I was young, I dreamed about ruins a lot, which seems a lot cooler than it was. The book Magni had was one of David Roberts's tomes on his travels in North Africa. Victorians couldn't get enough of his images of Egyptian temples filled to the eyeballs with sand. They're beautiful, but they do go on and on; page after page of tan limestone, sand, and teeny little figures to provide the viewer with some sense of scale. Magni's just obsessive enough to start imagining that he's seeing the same tiny figure over and over, to wonder what that person was like. Unlike those of many world builders, Magni's world contains no people. No fancy fantasy aliens, no elves or dwarves or fairies, or even ordinary people. If the buying public didn't stampede in, it would be empty—except for Magni, his memories, and that tiny figure . . . which eventually became the monster.

One of the girls mildly resembles Kyung from Mark Kalesniko's wonderful *Mail Order Bride*. I love that book. Among other themes it contains a brilliant examination of the way fantasy can cripple the identity as easily as it can free it. A minor note that still startled me was my recognition of one of Kalesniko's sources of inspiration: Lenn Redman's *How to Draw Caricatures*. The term "caricatures" conjures up images of fun-fair face painting and little kiddies ralphing up cotton candy, but Redman is a delineator of character on par with Hirschfeld. I had his book on my shelf. Many of the character designs in *Mail Order Bride* are identifiable in this book. I've used that book as inspiration for background characters too, particularly in *Talisman*.

The other girl looks very vaguely like the title character from Posy Simmonds's brilliant *Gemma Boverly*. Neither girl really looks like her source character; does the fact that I can't draw them the way their original artists do make them "mine"?

PAGE 97

This bookstore/café/hangout is nominally owned by Marcella Grosvenor, the protagonist of my previous book, *Talisman*. It is actually the brainchild of one of her wealthy relatives, who is one of those who think any relative who hasn't got their career quite figured out should start a



business. Needless to say, Marcie doesn't really run the place, but she has drawn an interesting gathering of creative people. The bindery workshops she runs out of it also draw . . . an interesting mix.

PAGES 98 AND 99

"Writers are liars, my dear" is from *Calliope*, by Neil Gaiman. The bit about going to the pack rat's burrow came from the second chapter of Gaiman's *The Books of Magic*, but the jar labeled "stolen ideas" came from Matt Howarth.

. . . And here's Marcie, all grown up. This is basically her look; unlike her siblings and Jaeger, who are rather chameleonic, she'll look more or less like this for the rest of her life. Quite a bit of time has passed since *Talisman*. She's in her thirties here. Magn is actually a bit younger than Marcie at twenty-three.

PAGE 100

He never said one word of warning to her. He was just trying to think of how to say it and she left while he was thinking.

This guy, the self-professed hack writer, his likeness came from another Neil Gaiman book: *Harlequin Valentine*, beautifully painted by John Bolton. He was Harlequin, of course. And Magri himself comes from half a dozen sources, not least of which are Seren, from Colleen Doran's *A Distant Soil*, and a relatively minor character from Yukito Kishiro's *Battle Angel Alita: Kaos*, Desty Nova's strung-out split-personality son. The more I wrote about Magri, the more doppelgängers he turned up; it does me no good to say I wasn't thinking of them as I wrote. How the hell can I know that, and what difference does it make? The only truly original thing is the blank page.

PAGE 101

Good grief. Open up my skull with a tire iron and let it slop around. I'm not even going to try to run down all of these rabbits. The quote right above Magri's head on the lower right corner is Oscar Wilde—but I always hear it in Gene Wilder's voice, since he quoted it as Willy Wonka in *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*.

PAGE 102

The name for Magri's otherworld came from Will Shetterly's book of the same name. I tried half a hundred other names, and nothing took root. Finally I just wrote to the man and asked if it was all right for me to use it, and he agreed. He said the bookstore in his novel came from a real shop that no longer exists. Will Shetterly's wife, Emma Bull, has written an urban fantasy novel titled *Finder*. In fact, at the time of this writing, I'm drawing a comic called *Queen & Country*, written by Greg Rucka. Greg has also written a novel called *Finder*. When I first settled on the name, I discovered to my dismay five books in print bearing that title. One giant shrug later, I went on with the book.

So Marcie's blank-bookstore-writer's hangout is called Elsewhere, and Magri's lawyers have forbade him to visit it—much as Marcie's have tried to keep her out of Magri's world. And so on.

PAGES 103 AND 104

The fortunes of a huge company rest on Magri's narrow little weasel shoulders. Some company officers panic every time he coughs.

Stilwater actually did try to advise Magri about the preparations White Senior was making prior to his death. Stilwater would have been thrilled to get some form of influence over Magri in place before the old man died. Magn was just too vague and unfocused to understand anything that was going on.

PAGE 105

"Nobody will look after your best interests like the corporation will . . ." It's amazing how many people want to believe this, even in this day and age.

PAGE 106

The doctor's little monsters-from-the-id speech: it's a common conceit that simply identifying the psychic roots of a problem is enough to solve it, that once you know why you're doing something, that's all you need to change your behavior. While it is certainly true that self-awareness is necessary to change, change requires HARD

WORK. Note that the doctor and nurses are all Sylvans, like most of the Elsewhere Corporation, Stilwater, and Magni himself. They are all of one clan. There's no way the members of this corporation, being Sylvans, could trust Magni to nonfamily medical personnel.

CHAPTER FIVE

PAGES 111–113

The medical profession in this city is dominated by Medawars, or more precisely Medawar women. Very few Medawar men become doctors; they in turn dominate the military and law enforcement. Stilwater's really on the bricks now, and he knows it.

Stilwater's desk clutter includes a sample maquette of a collectible statuette of Magni, there to be approved for sale, and a small real-time holographic display of Magni on his bed. The secretary/receptionist in panel 1 is yet another Blythe. She's entirely VR.

PAGES 114–116

I sidled around the idea of making Magni literally schizophrenic. I'd imagined that he was just having a nervous breakdown. Problem is, I have no clue what a nervous breakdown really is; it seems to be a catchall term for somebody who just shuts down under enough stress. All kinds of interesting things can happen to "perfectly normal" people if you squeeze them hard enough.

One of the interesting terms floating around pop psych these days is "shadow syndrome." It seems a reasonable-enough premise: that the more florid forms of mental illness, such as schizophrenia, manic depression, dissociative identity disorder, autism, and so on, have milder forms which occur in "normal" people. One might better think of them as trends, tendencies which often run in families. Without getting into the sticky business of defining biological versus environmental influences, let me say that the world would be a terribly static place without these trends.

All that said, I didn't at first intend Magni to be a full-blown schizophrenic. I hear voices all the time; I spend quite a lot of time untangling and identifying them, putting names and faces to them and trotting them out in these pages. Only once or twice have they ever shocked me, or been so dear that I might have briefly mistaken them for real people speaking. They are inside my head. It's my belief that this is perfectly commonplace. I wanted Magni to embody this attitude.

Unfortunately, the story required me to push

him till he cracked. I don't think that I would become schizophrenic if I was denied sleep for fifteen years, but I can't think of a better word for it. But I don't think that the voices Magni heard all the way back to age five were anything unusual; what was different was that he couldn't turn the volume down.

Oh, and the man who saves Magni from falling onto the tracks is based physically on Linda Medley's circus-carny character Alphonse, from *Castle Waiting: Solicitine*.

PAGE 117

Magni's mother isn't actually reading this book to him. It's got a sound chip in it. It reads itself. Magni won't let her touch him, so she can't even cuddle with him on the couch.

The name "Elster" comes from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, mysterious Madeleine Elster. The name is one of Hitchcock's little jokes. *Elster* means "mockingbird" in German. A "mocking bird"—a false woman.

PAGE 118

What's in the brain doesn't end up on the page exactly. Sometimes that's bad—it can never be captured properly. Most of the time it's good; the thing in the mind never focuses until you put it through the process of expression. Or else it changes irrevocably in that process and you just don't realize it. What the hell.





PAGES 119–121

I suppose a line needs to be drawn between Magri the successful artist and Magri the enervated, mushroomlike, undeveloped adult. He has a thick slice of everything: money, fame, a viable business, freedom to create. But on a personal level, he's no better off than someone who sits in his parents' basement and hallucinates at the keyboard twenty-four hours a day.

Bewa-a-a-re submerging yourself too deeply into any fantasy, or trying too hard to make that fantasy real.

The last two panels of page 121 were my attempt to draw a parallel between Magri's father's death and his discovery of Ayo's shattered avatar in *Elsewhere*. Push a memory away, and your mind will re-create it everywhere it can.

PAGE 122

The mathematician John Nash says he recovered from paranoid schizophrenia by conscious effort. Perhaps he did; there's some evidence to support the idea that it's a disease that may ease up with advancing age. But it also seems to be a disease heavily influenced by mood and the state of the self-image. How many paranoid schizophrenics have won the Nobel Prize? That's the kind of thing they usually *imagine* doing—coming up with a mathematical principle that changes how the world looks at hundreds of things, the ripples of which are still spreading,

that reinvented modern economics. Magri is, of course, doped to the eyeballs, but the fact that he does occupy a position of power and respect within his family, clan, and industry can't be overlooked in his "sudden recovery." After all, his parents are gone now; it can't not affect him.

PAGE 123

No, he really didn't know about the mask until then. Why would he?

PAGES 124 AND 125

In a previous chapter, rather than yell at a pack of underlings, he retreated into his mind—and even there, opened a "window" to yell and scream his frustration. That window opened onto blackness, a blackness he has mistaken for years for nothingness.

PAGE 126

Yes, that's the way it is. The monster is Magri's effort to clear out his head space, get himself a little privacy, peace, and quiet. He's never been able to make walls between the parts of his mind that are more and less personal. He doesn't really mind having people poke around *Elsewhere*; it's just that that landscape is intimately tied to his memories.

PAGE 127

These grotesque knotted-up bodies represent all kinds of neurological distress on the part of the tourists who've been visiting. Temporal lobe seizures can do some bizarre things. All of the effects the monster is describing can and do happen.

PAGE 128

. . . But they're all having a fine time, for exactly the reason the monster gives. A few endorphins, and everything's a happy thrill ride, and no matter how much they throw up afterwards, some people will climb right back on for more.

PAGES 129 AND 130

"Descent into madness" may be a cliché, but I've often wondered if that isn't exactly what it feels like. A slippery slope.

PAGE 131

Leaves us with the question: why does the monster resemble Jaeger at all? It can take any shape, and does. Why does it assume this Jaegerlike form? It's not as if Jaeger's image hasn't already gotten away from him. He's been in the movies, like it or not. Magri simply . . . picked him up. Made him his own. It goes its own way, but it picks things up as it goes.

CHAPTER SIX

PAGE 135

Murky mental glop. Piles of memories, half-personified. If he stopped to talk to any of these doppelgängers, he'd discover them to be disconnected memories of teachers, strangers, family members—endlessly repeated. The fact that they're all floating in this aimless way is a symptom of Magri's disintegration. Memories don't mean anything unless they are associated with one another—in effect, stories. These are entirely out of context. My original intent for this stage in the story was to have a lengthy free-associated sequence in which all the established elements of the story would crash together, in the standard horror-movie nightmare climax. When the time came, I found I couldn't write it. So instead of the free-association free-verse poem I'd hoped for, you get the opposite: a floating mess of meaningless memory.

In other words, hell. I shouldn't be disappointed.

PAGE 136

Most of the fragments are pieces of other people's means of dissociation. We all need a little of it here and there—daydreaming, reading, drawing. Losing ourselves. Zoning out. Magri needs a lot. All these people are inside the Elsewhere building. Down low is Jaeger; the thing he's whipping around is a fire hose.

PAGE 137

World building *isn't* writing. Fascinating though it is, it can bog down a story so easily . . . because if the details do not reinforce the theme, there's no point in them, apart from setting mood and establishing what's allowed. The story Magri is retelling himself is, of course, that of Oz the Great and Terrible.

PAGE 138

But he's not done telling himself the truth yet; he's not ready for escapism.

PAGE 139

The members of the board. Lobotomy might indeed have tamed Magri's monster. This procedure is enjoying a vogue in Anvard among people who have begun to reject drugs and all their "side" effects. Don't forget, when thorazine was first introduced, it was called "chemical lobotomy."

PAGE 140

"We're 'evergreen' now."



PAGE 141

The monster is not a person. It really can only say what Magri wants to hear—or is afraid to hear. It has incorporated Magri's "death" voices, which are, to my mind, present in everyone. That little voice that tells you to stand right on the edge of that ledge; why, it's no narrower than the curb of a sidewalk, you'd never think twice about standing on that if it were down on the ground, so what if there's no railing? That little voice that says it would be really cool to fall off. The thing that Magri was most afraid of people finding out, the thing that lent the monster extra violence in repelling visitors, was simply his fear of being "unmasked" as a creator.

PAGES 142–144

Magri, squirming.

Yes, Eister is Magri's middle name. There never was a brother.

PAGE 146

Magri's lucky. If his images of his parents were warm and enveloping, he never would have come out of his coma.

PAGES 147–149

Ever thumped yourself in the head because you felt stupid? Some people do a lot more. At least this is all in his head.

PAGES 150 AND 151

This idea came to me while I was watching my friends play *ICO*, a PlayStation 2 game. The



player controlled one figure in the game; a fairly sophisticated AI controlled the other. The girl's actions, determined by algorithm, were sometimes a little bit creepy . . . Whenever the player character was tear assing around doing things, she'd wander around aimlessly, pick at grass stems, look around, climb on top of things and sit down . . . Anyway, if a player got tired and handed the controls to someone else, that new person often had to familiarize himself with the controls. This makes him jump, that makes him swing his stick, that makes him call to the girl, etc., etc. Viewed from within the context of the game, he must have looked completely batshit insane, possessed by demons. Once I watched them trade off, do the usual jumping-jumping-turning-reaching business, and the girl was standing nearby . . . She put her hands up to her face and backed away.

So it seemed pretty clear that the monster, although created by Magri, was going to be . . . infested. By visitors who were not exactly controlling it, but who were certainly contributing to its strength and vitriol.

The reason Elsewhere, as a fantasy world, is more successful than other virtual-reality worlds of its type is because the imaginations of Magri's visitors are fully engaged when they enter. Their minds interact with his mind. They fill in all the details. They flesh out completely what Magri laid out. They're in it headfirst.

PAGE 152

In the future, the monster will be Magri's sheriff. It will delineate and defend private territory, and will dispense its own ideas of discipline to the visitors. Anybody who really can't play by the rules, it can turn them into all kinds of nasty things.

PAGE 153

Marcie, Jaeger, Stilwater, Magri's parents, Ayo—and some more mental static.

PAGE 154

The repeating theme on this page—"This is not a dream"—came from Evan Dorkin. It *isn't* a dream; it's a *psychodrama*. Fiction uses dreams as shorthand for psychodrama. Most dreams are not coherent symbolic reflections of one's internal landscape.

PAGE 155

For once, rag-doll-limp Magri assumes a normal sleeping position. It's so unusual that the nurse doesn't even recognize it for what it is—she's just ready to tear a chunk out of one of her orderlies for putting Magri in a position that may cause his blood to pool.

Every once in a blue moon I have a dream that has a coherent story line that I can use. The basic plot of *Dream Sequence* came from a dream.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PAGE 159

Magri has never seen the great outdoors. He has extrapolated all his environments from things he's seen in TV, gardens, still images, textures. He really has a hell of an imagination. From my point of view, I have to spend so much time trying to evoke the feeling of reality that HE evokes in his visitors. I have no time to show you all the things he gets wrong.

It feels real to him, so it feels real to them.

PAGES 160 AND 161

Fun with fisheye-lens effects. I always feel like this if I sleep in the middle of the day.

PAGE 162

What's going on here is that, since Elsewhere is sort of shut down, Magri's mind is trying to integrate itself into the Elsewhere building. It's a "smart" building, and he still has a few wireless connections, and his brain is accustomed to handling the details of hundreds and hundreds of "life-support" functions for visitors. It's used to maintaining an environment, so it's groping

for an environment to maintain. I didn't really have space to expand on this idea, so this page is really all it got. It's not where you get the ideas that matters, it's what you do with them. Oh, well . . .

PAGE 163

Yes, that's Jaeger, under all the dried blood.

PAGE 164

And yes, that's his kid. And those are *her* kids. And the girl to the left is Xini, from *Counting Coup*. The guy to the left is Jaeger's half brother. Like I say, a lot of time has passed since *Talisman*.

PAGE 165

Magri's stance and attitude are borrowed from Colonel Doctor Church, from *Aliens: Labyrinth*, written by Jim Woodring. The best mad scientist ever to gyrate across the page, and, coincidentally, another skinny white-haired git with a high forehead, bags under his eyes, and a dazed duckling act that isn't even really an act. Some of the time.

PAGE 166

I'd meant to have a scene in which the junior suits wasted a lot of time coming up with painfully bad alternative names for Magri's fantasy world, so I could incorporate all the ideas I tried on while trying to avoid using "Elsewhere." Oops; book's done.

PAGE 167

The two "archways" came from a piece of clip art; the bas-relief skulls are Aztec.

Inspiration by committee. Astonishing as it seems, committees can come up with good ideas. It's just when one comes to rely on panning their babble for gold that things bog down.

PAGE 168

Those marks on Magri's scalp are the major areas in which new implants will be laid. Right now only the medullar ones are in place—brand new, complete with wire ties. He picked out Matheson and Lewis because they were the only ones not grinning at him like idiots.

PAGE 169

Magri's still a bit too shaky to stand for a long time, but he wants to look them in the eye. He doesn't realize what he's doing when he sits on the back of his chair; but he's far more "in the world, and of the world" now.

PAGE 170

It's not that Lewis is so much better a person, or less weaselly a businessman. He'll bullshit Magri if he thinks it's in his best interests to do so. What Magri is learning is how careful you have to be, in an environment such as this, to make it in his advisors' best interests *not* to lie to him or bullshit him.

PAGE 171

The game *Myst* and its sequel *Riven* are huge parts of the inspiration for *Dream Sequence*. All the mist and fog was fascinating, partly because it was mysterious, partly because it was so practical. Not having to redraw all the details of the backgrounds every time you change direction saves compute cycles, and makes a better game. Magri sees now that a whiteout is agonizingly boring, but whatever he builds next will, I think, contain a lot of fog. He can hide a lot of personal stuff in impenetrable fog banks, and take his time deciding whom to let in that far.

PAGES 172 AND 173

I'm not quite done with Magri. He'll have his smaller roles to play, just as Marcie will have her things to say. He'll get up to some wild times with his monster, but still consider himself sexually inexperienced. "After all, it all takes place inside my head . . . Do lucid wet dreams even count as masturbation?"



PAGES 174 AND 175

Stilwater's last high note. Or perhaps not; he really is very sharp, and can help Magri a great deal.

These "snake egg" style monitors represent the members of the board. If things were bad enough they'd bully their CEO out of his job; they wouldn't risk being seen together, or going on record as having done anything of the kind.

PAGES 176-181

The thing in my head that animates Jaeger is more or less the same thing that animates Magri's monster. Some things about it are fairly static, others change subtly, others wildly. It's no mistake that he "played" a werewolf in Marcie's fantasy story in *Talisman*. It's interesting to me to see that Jaeger himself has "spawned" in *Finder*. This monster isn't Jaeger anymore, but retains a lot of basic Jaeger attitudes, things Magri needs to have in the back of his head. The monster is a construct of Magri's psyche, he took what he saw in Jaeger and it evolved from there. It's a mentor by nature. Put Jaeger off by himself, and he's the most close-mouthed man who ever lived. Put him in a room with a person with a problem, and he's on it like a parrot with a coconut. The monster took up three extra pages with this ending. He just took off when paired with Ayo.

So wait and see: there will be more monsters. Ayo will grow one of his own. So will all the "holdouts" that Magri's monster undertakes to rehabilitate. And Jaeger won't know anything about them.

Originally there was supposed to be a rather technical explanation for what the monster is doing here. He is inducing slow-wave sleep in the damaged visitors such as Ayo. Slow-wave sleep, as poorly understood as any part of sleep and dreaming, takes place early in the cycle, and seems to be when a great deal of our actual learning takes place. That's when things sink in. It is not characterized by vivid dreams. Dreams in slow-wave sleep tend to be flat and repetitive, or are continuations of reality as it was when you were falling asleep. Ever go berry picking, and see millions of berries swimming around when you close your eyes that night? That's slow wave. You can still be moderately conscious during slow wave.

We experience less and less of it as we age, and that may have some relationship to our diminished ability to learn past childhood. The monster can't wave a wand and restore Ayo. He can set everything up for Ayo to make his own repairs, though.

And, of course, the monster is the audience. The sounding board, to be more precise: that "Hope you finish that someday" is a direct quote from my frustrated friend, who's been panting over my shoulder for the next drawing since the very beginning.

PAGE 182

"Drink up, dreamers. You're running dry." That's Peter Gabriel.

Where is Magn? Who are all these kids? Is that Jaeger? Good grief, save some questions for later . . . It'll all be in the footnotes.

MYSTERY DATE

PART ONE

PAGE 191

These first eight pages were redrawn from pages originally presented in the anthology *Mythography*. Why redraw them? Because I was having a hard time getting back into the story, to which I'd never had enough time to devote myself.

[Editor's note: all references to redrawn images refer to the versions printed in the first *Mystery Date* collection.]

Panel 2. Deer-head construct. He's not a teacher; he's a teacher's assistant, a super-secretary. He's the one to appeal to if you want something done, and he's the one who ends up having to teach most of the Mighty Impressive Big Shot's classes. He's a digitigrade: he has to go tottering around on little hard deer hoofs. He has a mild fetish for human girls with cute feet.

The guy next to him is "one of those people who live way out in the ocean" who taught Jaeger how to sleep underwater. The orangutan with the Lolita fixation is technically a construct, but he's a special case. They're most often found at research libraries, and even so, they're rare. Ho boy! Nobody will believe that I hadn't read Terry Pratchett before I drew him in, or that I had forgotten about him entirely until just this minute. Oooooook!

PAGE 192

"Xenology" just means "study of strangers," whereas anthropology means the study of how humans do things. This term was coined to cover all cultures, human or otherwise. Non-*Homo sapiens* are bitterly divided between being infuriated at being denied the term "human" and those who are pleased not to be lumped in with the skin monkeys.

Javecek is another domed city like Anvard. Not a nice place.

PAGE 193

Note the professor's complicated cranial jack. Three ports: two set into the mastoid processes (those bony bumps behind the ears) and one into the base of the occipital bone, just about the atlas vertebra. This is one of the most sophisticated brain-computer interfaces money can buy, and provides the fastest possible transfer of information from head to machine and back again.

Not shown are the two jacks in his pelvis that handle much of his control over his prosthetic legs.

Don't be expecting to see those.

PAGES 194 AND 195

Shar has little trouble keeping up with vehicular traffic. Urban Laeske do have to take traffic lessons and abide by the law. His leaping the concrete barrier is a pretty hefty no-no and would have cost him a fine if he'd been caught.

PAGE 196

Shar doesn't *need* to make those disgusting noises when he does this, any more than humans have to make noise yawning. It just *feels* good.

The Laeske have a huge dry crop in their throats in which they store things. Shar can keep road maps in his crop without getting them wet, and bring them up whenever he needs them. His crop is only as messy as the average purse or book bag.

PAGE 197

The markings on the toilet top match those of a young-at-foot, a baby that's not old enough to keep up with the family herd. There are predators that can threaten them out in the world.

Laeske have prodigious memories. In most cases their entire early education is transmitted orally. This didn't slow down the Romans or the Greeks, so let us not underestimate them.

PAGE 198

Young Laeske are herd creatures. They prefer to stay in large, highly structured groups composed of females and children. Males are much more solitary.

Their tongues are long, dry, and very flexible. They use them as an elephant uses its trunk. The human gesture of shaking hands presents no problem to them—just to the human faced with all those jagged teeth.

VARIATIONS

PAGE 199

Redrawn from the inside cover of *Mystery Date* #1. The tiny figure is Garuda, steed of the gods. Fierce thing.

PAGE 201

"Variations" originally ran in *Mythography* #4, and has been redrawn.

Vary is a student, Ollie is an instructor. Vary is working under a trainee's license and can't take customers outside her work shift at Lian-Jin. Ollie, as a construct, can't legally teach. He's a free construct, but that doesn't give him the

same rights as an ordinary citizen. He's based on my friend Bill's Pomeranian, Ollie the Pom wears a harness too.

PAGE 202

These are the rock stars and movie gods of Anvard. Any profession can breed a celebrity, given the attention of a patron and the artist's willingness to live the life. A patron is required by contract to support his or her artist's career. What the artist is required to do varies, but the public assumes they are always available sexually to the patron.

PAGE 203

Vary's town gets road and river traffic. Temple girls (and boys) make money for the temple from travelers.

This town and others like it are subject to terrible floods. They take it in stride. Their houses are big squared-off pottery jars, baked and sometimes glazed. They stay waterproof for generations. When the floods come, they batten down the windows and keep moving upwards. A house in good condition doesn't leak, but they try not to tempt fate by living in the submerged parts.

PAGE 204

If you're on the road in this area, you buy supplies and lodging from the temples. The temple girls (and boys) are there to get the rest of your money. They may stay temple whores all their lives; they sometimes take vows and join the temple itself, if the monks and nuns agree to take them.

The other option, going to the pleasure gardens of local royalty, and there extracting money from the rich, isn't really an option anymore. Nobody's rich and the palaces are falling into ruin, except in a few places very close to heavy traffic.

PAGE 205

Jaeger's first cameo. Vary knows him from her long and complicated journey to Anvard. He was working as a bouncer in a way house. Way houses take over where the temples leave off. The people in that area aren't Vary's people.

Constructs were first designed to be organic machinery. Tools that could feed themselves instead of needing to be fueled, computers that programmed themselves, replacement dirty workers. They didn't look like much. That sort of construct does still exist, but people don't think about them much. Not until someone got the bright idea of making fancy sex toys did constructs like Ollie appear—rapidly booming

into their own industry and art form. Constructs' thoughts on the matter aren't usually a matter of record. There are a good few "free" constructs in houses like Lian-Jin and Temple House.

PAGE 207

I blame Phil Foglio for Vary's slippers. You can, too.

PAGE 208

The Laeske written language looks like Rorschach blots. It's a pictographic language, though few non-Laeske can see any resemblance between what a given shape stands for and the thing itself.

PAGE 209

"Classic" ran in *Mythography* #6. These stories had to be done fast and furious, but they did make me find new ways to do things.

I couldn't face drawing this crowd scene, so I just drew the word balloons. Sometimes the easy way out is really interesting.

This is the kind of thing you won't often see in a book written by one person, drawn by another, lettered by a third. The writer could blithely say, "HUGE CLASSROOM, PACKED TO THE GILLS," and write all that dialogue.

The artist would kill himself drawing a convincing crowd scene, making sure the perspective on all the chairs was right, maybe slip in a few in jokes, that sort of thing. Then the letterer would look at all the word balloons in the script and scream bloody murder. Can't be done! Not without covering up almost all of the crowd, or else reducing the dialogue to inky illegibility! Do it, says the editor; that's the effect the writer wants. So the letterer does it, and now it's the artist's turn to scream.

For me, it was the cheap way out.

PAGE 210

There are no constructs in the class. Ollie's just visiting.

PAGES 211 AND 212

The voice she is answering is partly Zee and partly her father. She's been awed since childhood by thorny, difficult wise men. A girl promised to the temple has two ways to go. One: stay a dancer or flute girl forever, with no education, a bowl of rice to be handed out to any traveler who stays the night. They serve a purpose in the religion, but they're likened to flowers: they wither soon. Two: attach herself to a monk and prove herself worth teaching.

The Hautama use dragons to symbolize wisdom. This is not to say Hautama dragons are welcoming things.

PAGE 213

I hate to admit it, but I have no idea what's going on here. I was following the advice of a friend, and free-associating the story. "Figure it out later," he said. Well, it's later, and I still don't get what he's doing. The only thing that comes to mind is the phrase "crystallized intelligence," which means what you've learned and can use.

PAGE 214

"The Road to Hell Paving Co." originally ran in *Mythography* #7. I've been asked (sometimes indignantly) just why Zee is so opposed to Vary's attentions. Simple—she's his student. It doesn't matter how cute, sweet, and understanding she is; she's still a student. That she continues to pursue him without a particular favor to ask makes her seem even more crazy and improper to him.

Vary has the particular arrogance of the attractive person. She's used to sliding by on her looks, and doesn't understand that he's oblivious to them.

PAGE 215

As a younger girl, Vary was appalled by street bums. She's trying to work out a bit of guilt at despising ugly people. She doesn't think about these things very much, and doesn't understand them well at all.

PAGES 216 AND 217

If Vary was a little swifter, she'd understand that the "nice" cop doesn't really care what happens to her. These are still Medawars, but they're a northern subfamily. Anvard is in the north, but the round-faced, stocky Medawars who dominate the city are southern Medawars. Think of them as mastiffs and bulldogs. The northerners patrol Old Town, at the lower levels.

The drug that makes people like to set fires comes from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. *Matriza* is a slang contraction of Mother Teresa.

PAGE 218

Shar is quite able to talk while using his tongue tip to do other things. It's all in the throat for him, like a parrot. He does not open and close his jaws much when he speaks, and his lips do not move at all. His grin is perpetual, like a dolphin's.

Shar has many more spots and streaks in this story than he ultimately turned out to have. I'm going to blame molting.

PAGE 219

"Teacher's Pet." Vary hasn't really given up on Zee. Go ahead, babe, you just keep on day-dreaming . . .

Ollie eats like a fiend. Like a little dog, really. He will eat until his eyes cross, sleep heavily, run it all off, then stick his nose in another bucket of fried chicken. Food, sex, exercise, and sleep: that's his recipe for a happy life. He can't read, doesn't watch TV, and cares only slightly for clothes.

PAGES 221–223

Ollie and Vary are not "happy hookers." They're happy because they like the people they work with, and for. This doesn't mean they have no emotional kinks to work out.

LUX

PAGE 227

Temple University is huge in more ways than one. Composed of many smaller colleges, it is the seat of higher learning for the northern region. Lian-Jin is a satellite school.

The voice "speaking" is Vary's internalization of Milya. Her internalization of her childhood friend Rudra is much harsher.

Sunlight is at a premium in these domed cities. The globes which light the streets are color corrected to simulate sunlight, and are meant to give off just enough ultraviolet to produce vitamin D in the skin and regulate sleep cycles, but people still crave the real thing. If you want to live cheap, you move to a "night" neighborhood in the interior of the dome, which is not lit as brightly for the "day" cycle, or a "twilight" neighborhood which is lit very dimly at all times. In those neighborhoods, you need extra sun time. Traveling to a day neighborhood in which real sunlight is piped in with fiber optics is one way to do this. Vary and Ollie are in a day neighborhood high up and just under the skin of the dome. The dome absorbs all radiation on its surface and transmits certain wavelengths into its interior.

If this was in color, you'd see that Vary is wearing quite the itchy-bitsy teeny-weeny yellow polka-dot bikini.

PAGE 230

The star patterns on the dome's skin aren't

transparent to the exterior. They're not even translucent. They're just where the dome concentrates and emits stored solar radiation.

PAGE 231

I've been threatening to use my old friend Jef's likeness in a Vary story for years now. Here we go.

PAGE 232

First and only time I buy *The Star*, folks. Maureen Orth coined the term "celebrity-industrial complex," and I will gladly use it.

PAGE 233

I'm not sure I really made it clear in this story that the fictional Jef is an animator. He captures the little gestures of his subjects. A turn of the wrist, a shifting of balance, a drawing in of breath, all the little moments a static drawing can't. Unfortunately, I'm using static drawings. Sigh.

PAGE 234

Join a guild, take a collar—Anvardian society contains a lot of feudal elements. Many professions are dominated by one clan or another, and if you want to get anywhere in, say, animation, you'll be dealing with a lot of oaths and rules and sign heres and giving up of freedoms. In the guild halls, you lose a lot of freedom but don't get a lot of security; if you "take a collar" you get a lot of security but you are indentured to your owner. You are a slave. Slaves of the sort Jef would be have it easy, comparatively speaking: the term is limited, the slave has rights, there is a contract. It's not unlike being owned by the army, and there are as many and as violently diverse opinions about taking collars as there are about joining the military.

PAGE 235

Vary's is a third option. If you can attract the attention of a rich patron, you retain your freedom and gain financial support. Artists are expected to be available sexually to their patrons; slaves aren't. Slave lawyers make all kinds of money chasing rich clan people who have overstepped their bounds.

PAGES 236 AND 237

Each of these Artists has a little halo of notoriety. The little floating screens are projected onto air particles. Stars like smoky rooms.

The girl in the foreground is based on a photo of a well-known young actress who was, at the

time I was doing this story, suffering very publicly from an eating disorder. When I looked closely at her cover photo, I noticed that the irises of her eyes were oval. The magazine had compressed her image slightly from side to side to make her look even more emaciated. Haha.

PAGE 238

More little floaty snake eggs. These project more news articles. They're like flies. You have to wave them away from your head when you eat at street cafés.

In the lowermost right corner—the company that makes these animals lets 'em go on the streets to breed. Cheap bastards. Once one turns up on your doorstep, looking pitiful, and you decide to feed it up and give it a name, its genetically encoded transmitter signals the company, which shows up with a contract for you to sign and a lot of products to sell you.

PAGE 239

Veluna's and others like it get raided periodically. They operate mainly in the older parts of the city. Someone's got to cater to people who aren't rich. This is why Vary's so surprised that Veluna's is so nice inside.

PAGE 240

It's a perfectly legitimate pub. Really.

Again, these pictures move. Dunno if that comes across.

PAGE 241

Veluna herself, played by Claire/Zanya of *Bite Me!* Dylan Meconis kicks.

PAGES 243–251

The following nine pages are reprinted from *Mythography*. They're the first story pages I drew with a brush, and I had every intention of redrawing them for this collection. Ah well.

PAGE 243

Panel 3, poster behind Shar. *Bermooft, Land of the Eel and Onion*. That's from Walt Kelly's *Pogo*.

PAGE 244

Panels 5 and 6. This gag was Vary's genesis. She was created for this one joke. When I decided to use the two professors for *Mythography* stories, I wanted to keep Jaeger out of it. Vary instantly became the question-asking character in his place.

PAGE 246

Temple House, first mentioned in *Finder #9*, is a house of fine repute run by the same family that united many of the local colleges into one university.

When Anvardians talk about the arts, they mean any creative endeavor. When they talk about *the Art*, they mean sex. Specifically, they mean a complicated system of patronage in which rich clan people support artists, writers, dancers, and certain types of professionals in pursuit of celebrity. There are other ways of approaching the creative life in this society, but they involve guild houses (also controlled by the clans) or actual slavery.

Lian-Jin is one of the Ivy Leagues of the Art. Plenty of houses aren't this nice, and don't turn out the glossiest of potential Artists. There are franchised houses like MacFleiss's, in which you order off a fluorescent menu bar and all the talent wear identical polyester uniforms. If you want McSex, you can get it.

PAGE 247

Mrs. K is one of those people who always has two or three reasons for everything she does.

PAGE 248

Panel 4. This is a frescoed ceiling. Really. Ollie is a construct. That doesn't mean he wasn't born, but he does come from a factory. The private lives of constructs are quite strange. I'll get to that in the next book.

Bax is a retired gladiator who never made it big. The shaggy-haired girl is Milya. She makes very weird dolls.

Two naked guys and two more-or-less dressed women. That's my little joke.

PAGE 250

Statistically, more people in Anvard would call themselves monosexual than otherwise, but not in Vary's circle. It isn't cool.

Remember, Dr. Zee has an extremely sophisticated cranial jack. Web surfing can be very intense.

PAGE 251

Wapembe was Ollie's last owner. They're still friends. Wapembe is a cribbage-sharking oracle.

PART TWO: OUT**PAGE 255**

The little creature in the grass isn't a mouse. It's a lizard. It lives the way a mouse does and is a

common pest in the same way. It comes in a variety of groovy colors and has very sharp teeth. These grasslands are to the north of Anvard.

PAGE 257

Both bluestem and sawgrass exist in our world. Bluestem is a common prairie grass, which gave its name to the country-music style. Sawgrass is a tropical and subtropical plant found in marshland, like Louisiana and Florida. It and its cousin, saw palmetto, are edible, but can cut you to ribbons if you don't crush them up first.

Many of the plants that transformed this former dune desert into grassland were developed by the Laeske in conjunction with the Huldres, ambulatory farmers.

PAGE 258

Haixha is pronounced *HIGH-sha*. Laeske language runs heavily toward sibilants, but they don't pronounce them the way humans do. They have no ear for human s sounds and tend to replace them with trills. They roll their r's ferociously. Those dry tongues can make many more sounds than human ones can.

Laeske have domesticated many species of animal. They choose animals that can keep up with a startled herd, either by running or flying, and which make strong social bonds with their trainers. They do not often herd food animals, preferring to train hunting beasts that will help them take down one of the local megafauna. Some herds use pack animals, or those who readily adopt protection of Laeske children.

PAGE 259

For a Laeske, Shar comes pretty close to understanding how human sexual practices work, but he can't help having only an outsider's perspective. Since he has a specific season for fertilization, the thrills he gets from running and carrying riders are somewhat desexualized at other times. He doesn't think of them as sexual, though they are linked to his sexual habits.

It may at first seem very strange to think of carrying weight on his back as sexual. As one who was raised to train birds and birdlike creatures, he'd be the first to tell you that you don't make a habit of gripping certain birds under the wings. The pressure simulates the sensations of being mounted sexually. In birds that form strong mate bonds, this can lead to the bird "falling in love" with you. Doesn't sound bad? Wait till the bird gets jealous and takes a chunk out of you.

With the Laeske, carrying a rider doesn't elicit a sexual response, but it taps into the wellspring of sexual energy. An adult carrying a baby runs farther, faster, and longer than an unencumbered one. An adult without a baby is more likely to be taken down by a predator.

A Laeske would far rather run than be carried. They don't usually domesticate any animal big enough for them to ride. As the young mature, they get whinier about being carried. Snarly teenagers.

PAGE 260

The pipe-organ sound is the Laeske company in concert. Laeske don't have vocal cords; they have an avian bifurcated trachea. Ask any parrot—this doesn't keep them from making some hellish loud sounds.

This mating call is one example of a very high-decibel signal language they have for communicating across open country. They also drum. Some signals are for other Laeske, some just to warn predators that there are a lot of them together, so hungry types shouldn't get any bright ideas.

Shar's brand-new masculine mating plumage is nothing like enough to enable flight, but the asymmetrical feather is a fearsomely efficient thing. It gives him just enough lift to take some of the weight off his legs, so his exertions can be more fully translated into forward velocity. Ironically, if they gave him too much lift, he couldn't run as fast, because his feet couldn't dig into the ground as strongly. Even very young males such as Shar cannot glide very far. Shar is large for a first-year male, and he'd go tail over teakettle if he tried to pull both legs up at once.

PAGE 261

These two scouts are Nyima, a third plains-dwelling people. They have their own reasons for keeping their eyes on the Laeske gathering. Haixha can say a few words in a human language, but having been raised by Laeske, she's better with their talk.

Laeske have a second vocabulary of whistles, trills, hums, and gargles, which are rarely mixed in with the polysyllabic speech that humans can learn. Human linguists tend to separate the two into singing and speaking, but the relationship is more like that of a formal "high" speech and an informal "low" one. Humans have a rough time with the high speech if for no other reason than they don't have enough lung volume to pronounce things loudly enough.

The Nyima have a deeply resonant ceremonial call based upon Laeske high speech.

PAGE 262

Panel 2. The creatures in the tree are young at-foot Laeske. They have to go somewhere while their mothers and aunts are cavorting. At this age, they climb like monkeys.

This location has been the traditional meeting place for mating season so long, it's built into their instinctive migratory patterns.

Singular glacial rocks have become accepted as property of individual families. They do like to stretch out on a hot rock. When Shar or his close family comes to the gathering with nonparticipants, they stay at Holo Rock.

PAGE 263

The professor prefers not to wear his prosthetics while riding in that howdah saddle because they get the mechanical equivalent of leg cramps. Without his legs, he would be in considerable trouble if Haixha fell and dumped him out. To Shar, this makes him enough like a young-at-foot to offend the living hell out of him.

That's why Zee won't ride his partner's back. The ones with the manes but without wings are female. The males are always larger, heavier, slower. Males go through several color changes over the years. First years like Shar are usually blue or green. The females are far less colorful.

PAGE 265

Haixha has unpacked herself. The buckles on her harness are the only parts of her rig designed to foil her attempts to undo them, though she could nip through the straps with a little effort. Good training is everything. The trouble with having really smart beasts of burden is that you have to keep their minds occupied.

EASY BEING GREEN

PAGE 267

Redrawn from the cover of *Mystery Date #2*. Much as I loved the Muppets—this song became Kermit's theme—it must be a lot easier being green when you are green to begin with.

PAGE 269

Vary is wearing a denim corset here.

PAGE 270

The soil is still very shallow here, and the sand is fine river silt. The dust rises.

PAGE 272

The dust cloud itself can make it rain, if there are clouds low enough to be seeded. The Laeske might take this as a fertility symbol if they were the kind of people to worry about that sort of thing.

PAGE 275

Vary is never caught off guard by lack of clothing. Any spare sheet or tablecloth can be made into a perfectly serviceable sarong.

PAGE 276

These eyes in the sky are a journalist's tool. They can be assigned to follow a particular individual or stay in one fixed spot to watch.

PAGE 277

Still not happy with this woolgathering of the professor's. Ah, well.

PAGE 280

Vary is a little handicapped here herself. If she wasn't so worried about doing the wrong thing, the professor wouldn't be so finchy.

PAGE 282

These prosthetics were never intended for a human. He prefers to wear them instead of conventional ones because of their superior balance and responsiveness. This man would rather look bizarre than helpless.

PAGE 283

This coat she's wearing is versatile. It unsnaps six ways from Sunday and folds up into a very small and lightweight ball. It and her coverall are also very, very tough. They're all state-of-the-art gear for voyaging into the dangerous outside world. The big flat hat she did not wear for this trip off the rock is as light as its basket-woven predecessor, but is as tough and solid as a motorcycle helmet.

PAGE 284

These three may not know a word of any human language. They're country girls, with no ambitions as yet toward scholarship.

PAGE 286

Ta-daa! Jaeger's southwestern shirkicker look! Amazing how many people wrote in to ask me if that really was him. Every convict knows: a little facial hair works wonders.

PAGE 287

Two of this hat's more useful functions: you can cook in it, and it's protective camouflage—at least, it offers protection from Laeske. There are

a good few carnivores which would gladly eat the young-at-foot, and they look at those three stripes in a slightly different way

When I first wrote this book, I had a scene which explained Jaeger's horrible nickname. Then I realized I'd written a forty-page book, and I didn't have enough money to print a forty-page book, so I edited.

Vary knew Jaeger from a small way house between her town and Anvard. He was a bouncer, and all the girls called him Pookie.

PAGE 288

This thing Vary's having Haixha crack open is sort of a melon with a hard shell like a coconut. Its meat is very rich and sweet-sour. It's poisonous to humans if taken in large quantities. Vary was raised on it, and so has a tolerance, but its role in the diet of her people does have some say in their short lifespans.

PAGE 290

Not a girl in a thousand would say yes to this, including me. Pity.

PAGE 291

It has been remarked that, with this mustache, Jaeger looks like he's part Medawar. Trust me, he's not. There's enough resemblance between the Medos and his father to give him an occasional twinge, but that's all.

PAGE 292

This is a very abstract way of speaking. Jaeger's alone far too much to understand that what seems perfectly clear to him may not get his point across. Not, mind you, that Vary is really paying attention. One of the many men upon whom Jaeger is based is named Cat Boy.

PAGE 293

This is a breathy, sweet-voiced pipe like a *shakuhachi*, played with a lot of trills. She knows how to make several different types of wind instruments, and really prefers a pipe with a warm droning sound, but she made do with the materials at hand.

PAGE 295

This "bit of doggerel," as Cat Boy called it, is a poem titled "Travelogue for Exiles" by Karl Jay Shapiro. I've lost mine, so if anyone has a copy, please send it along.

PAGES 296–297

What we're seeing here is what the professor

sees. He can adjust the level of detail he sees, but he doesn't see much color. He sees perfectly well through his eyelids, and the bandanna keeps them from getting cold and giving him headaches.

PAGE 298

His discovery of a Hautama right under his nose is like one of us suddenly finding out that one of our drinking buddies is really Tarzan on weekends. He fell into the common idea that nobody who seems civilized can possibly be anything exotic.

The buzzard which has been circling around for the past few days has at last made a kill. He's got a fair-sized young quetzal, a lizard with wings on all four legs. An older quetzal might have eaten the buzzard itself.

Quetzals can walk on their claws, bending in the middle in an exaggerated way. They launch themselves into the air in a sharp, sidewinding motion. They're rather slow fliers, but are among the few beasts that eat the king-sized dragonflies. Out on the plains you don't see so many of them, so it's as rare a bird as Vary herself.

PAGE 299

Here we have two people who'll never agree on the least thing, but Vary has finally figured out that the type of intercourse this professor can be engaged in is not sexual.

PAGE 300

The Nyima hail their god of war as a bringer of civilization. This doesn't make sense unless you consider that the Greek god of wine and drunkenness was also considered a god of civilization. The Nyima learned falconry from the Laeske—not directly, but through observation as well as how they domesticate other animals for their own use. This completely revolutionized their lives, made them capable not only of competing with their enemies but of killing them, clearing them out. They thought of the Laeske only as animals, but very, very strange animals. Teacher beasts. The Nyima do kill Laeske, but only for ritual purposes.

PART THREE: DANCE STEPS

PAGE 305

. . . Originally presented in *Finder* #31. Vary's schoolroom is down in the lower part of the city. These miles of arched corridors are at the base of the dome and underground, although at that level there are so many buildings built above that "underground" is a tricky definition. It is at

this level that much of the city's supplies move around. There are a couple of million stairwells allowing access up and down, but there are also thousands of elevators, specialized for various purposes. Trash elevators, pedestrian elevators, vehicle lifts, heavy freight, and light freight—but there are also express elevators for firemen, police, and paramedics.

PAGE 306

Here's Rudra again, doin' her *Amy Unbounded* dance. As far as Vary knows, she stayed back in their little village.

After this issue was published, a reader named Sara Rosenbaum told me this story:

"I take Mallan dance classes, and after about two years I decided to ask my teacher, 'Seydou, what were we doing?'

'Happy dance,' he says, every time I ask him.

'Teach us a sad dance,' I said once. He explained to me that he couldn't; you'd have to be initiated into the secret societies that perform the sad dances. Seydou is initiated into those societies, although now he spends most of his time teaching the happy dances to white kids at an East Coast university. He's a person whose life bridges two distinct cultures, but he's happy to share them. I sometimes wonder what that's like for him."

PAGE 307

Depicting dance in static images is mighty frustrating.

PAGES 308–310

This kind of dance is most lovely when it's performed *en masse*. These aren't just temple girls; this is the whole village's worth at the full-moon festival. They've been dancing since moonrise; they'll dance till moonset.

PAGE 311

City people don't cook, not like country people do. Vary was one of those kids sent to the market three times a day, who was put on a stool and told to stir the big pot without touching it from the time she was three.

PAGE 312

What does Ollie teach? Exercise. Nobody can keep up with the little dog's full-speed aerobics classes. That's an extensive climbing wall behind them.

PAGE 313

This is no particular yoga sequence, unless it's

one Vary came up with. Ollie thinks Vary should bag the patron route and teach with him.

PAGE 314

Over the course of the issue, Vary's dance-instructor costume becomes more traditional. That thing she's wearing is just one big piece of fabric. Wearing draped clothing is an art in itself.

PAGE 315

Vary is unable to grapple with the idea that a "titty bar" might be a bad thing in a general way. To her, there are nice places to dance, and less nice places to dance. She hasn't seen enough of the nasty ones and their prevailing attitude.

Most of the objects on Zee's bookshelves have a little data port on their spines. They pop open like DVD cases, but there isn't much inside to read. Like most people, he just leaves them on the shelf and plugs in.

PAGE 316

I left out the doctor's third cranial jack. *Whoops!*

PAGE 317

This is the first time you get a look at the professor's eyes. He covers them up because they get cold.

PAGE 318

Vary has learned to be casual with him. The more offhand you are with physical contact, the less likely he is to go for the jugular.

PAGE 319

It's funny how a little disillusionment with a loved one can make your relationship more comfortable.

PAGE 320

The Hautama believe that everybody is born with a tiny spark of a soul, like a seed that can grow. Their word for "child" is very close to their word for "grass seed." They liken living to the way grass plants make soil out of sand. Grasses have incredible root systems, and years of growth create soil. Souls, they say, must do a similar thing—send out runners and make connections, the more the better, in order to grow and evolve. Not every soul has what it needs to survive the death of the body intact. Some souls are great enough to sustain many others and help them to grow on after death; others linger in various degraded states or gutter out entirely.

PAGE 321

Baksheesh means money. This little token is an enameled and engraved tarsier skull, set

with two emeralds. It's a navel jewel. Both the skull and the butterfly represent the soul. To many ancient cultures, bones are the incorruptible flesh. The butterfly comes from the Greek Psyche belief.

PAGE 323

New page for the trade-paperback collected edition.

PAGE 324

In *Finder #31*, I ran this page after everything else—letters, backup story, ads: everything. I was thinking of those snippets of film that sometimes follow the credit scroll at the end of a movie.

Ah, little Miss Touchy-Feely!

There is a good-sized Hautama population in Anvard. Vary doesn't mix with them except at places where she expects to dance.

THE RESCUERS

PROLOGUE

PAGES 329–331

We are out in the grasslands near a city called Anvard. The native fauna are dominated by birds and birdlike related species. Unlike pheasants and other ground-running blast-off birds with a similar profile, these birds' tails are long and lizardlike.

"Ascian" is a generic term for tribal humans living inside and outside the domed cities. They are as variable in culture, custom, and language as Native Americans. These are seminomadic, traveling a broad loop through forest and grassland, settling during the growing season. They can repack their own bullets, but they have to buy powder and other supplies.

There are other bird species besides cuckoos that lay their eggs in other birds' nests. Around here, there are hordes of cowbirds. These parasitize songbirds mostly, and are amazingly prolific. A few songbirds have learned to deal with foreign eggs in their nests, some by expelling the eggs, some by abandoning the nest entirely (including their own eggs). One species simply builds a new nest on top of the old nest and starts over . . . one such nest was found to have six chambers, each containing eggs from both species!

The problem with cowbirds is that they thrive on forest verges. Deep-woods songbirds had nothing to worry about. But the more we cut up the woods to make places to live, the more edges we have, and more cowbirds. In some states there are capture-and-kill programs that are intended to help keep their numbers in check, since many of their victim species are endangered. I see eight or nine cowbirds in my garden every day. One of the nine will be a female. They don't seem too bothered.

TOWN HOUSE, COUNTRY HOUSE

PAGES 332 AND 333

I was casting around for a composition for this part of Anvard. Anvard is one of many huge domed cities. The city isn't flat. Here, we're down at the bedrock level. The streets are narrow and twisty and everything is built on top of everything else, filled in and hollowed out and covered over. There are very few wide-open views. Having flipped through a lot of reference on very old European streets, I found myself copying—yes, COPYING—a street-scene

composition from Linda Medley's *Castle Waiting*. Such a beautiful book, and here I was, leeching off of it . . . well, being too lazy and stupid to trash it and come up with something else, I left her characters Chess and Rackham in, having changed their clothes a bit. They are, respectively, the bird-headed man with the briefcase and the horse-headed man walking with him. Now go read *Castle Waiting*.

The screens growing everywhere are called "kudzu" after the fast growing weed which engulfs fields and trees in the southern states of America. Kudzu was imported to help with soil erosion during the Dust Bowl era, and to feed cattle, but cows just don't eat it fast enough . . . It's the vine that ate the South. At any rate, this kudzu is a biomimic which was originally developed as a self-regulating streetlight. It needs darkness to grow, so each of the light-emitting screens faces as best it can away from its fellows. It grows like a vine; it parasitizes electricity by tapping into power lines, as willows can dig into your wellheads or septic tanks. Once they raise the ambient light past a certain point, they can't grow anymore. No problem, right? Apart from the way they raise everyone's power bills, no problem. Well, one problem. Once they reach saturation point, a few quirks in their seek-out-power-source, avoid-other-colonies programs start interfering with one another, and the result is an audible feedback whine at varying decibels. And then some enterprising individuals modified the old kudzu screens to transmit television signals, and it was all over.

PAGE 335

This street dead-ends at the baronial estate Manavelin. "Manavelins" are leftovers, odds and ends. The baron had to buy over two hundred separate tiny parcels of real estate.

Manavelin being an area frequented by frustrated tourists, these screens are yattering away on the topic of the local baron, his family, and his home. He bought great chunks of streets and buildings on four levels of the city to make room for this huge house and its grounds.

PAGE 336

Anvard is dominated socially by eight large clans and innumerable small ones. Within each clan are several families, but each clan has a defined appearance and temperament, like a dog breed. They're rather closed societies. It's eugenics on a large scale, but without a single ideal; rather, each clan has its own ideas. baron Manavelin

and his wife are of a lesser clan, Gildale. His financial success has raised the status of his clan quite a bit, but not enough to admit them into the eight-clan nobility.

PAGE 337

The kudzu screens act like holograms, each shattered piece continuing to transmit—at least for a short time.

SOFTLY COME AND GO

PAGE 338

The chapter name is part of the lyric of “Love’s Old Sweet Song.” I got it stuck in my head.

Manavelin’s grounds are all wooded, which should give you some idea how rich this man is. When he bought the land, it was just more twisty, narrow, confined city streets. We are not “outside.” We are inside a small dome—tiny in comparison to the one that spans and supports Anvard itself. The miniature dome is hung with artificial lights intended to promote plant growth. The dome is large enough to create small clouds, fog, and rain, which are regulated by air handlers. Camelot.

PAGE 339

There are “urban” Ascians. They’re very like the Pennsylvania Dutch, in that they keep strictly to certain styles of dress and housing, and filter out a lot of city tools and ways, but they live in colonies near and sometimes inside the domes. These are not urban Ascians. They’re more of the seminomadic type from the prologue. They’ve been invited by the baroness to live on the grounds and work their textiles for the city market. The men are supposed to be working the grounds, but they’re more than a little unsettled by the women having all the money.

PAGE 340

These Ascians don’t keep large mammals, and therefore don’t drink milk. Their pack animals are all dinosaur-like megafauna.

Lydia is a default scullery maid. A “scullion” is in essence a servant for servants. Ordinarily she would do a lot of cleaning, pot scrubbing, and help with cooking meals for the staff. She’s not officially employed by the baron and receives no wages. She does what she’s told by the head cook.

Lydia has a bit of Ascian blood, a lot of Ascian fascination, and no Ascian firsthand knowledge. Jaeger is half Ascian, and has lived much of his

life outside, so she isn’t going to let him out of her sight.

PAGE 342

Baron Manavelin’s personal name is George Lockrum. A “lockrum” is an unpopular idea. The name was bestowed upon his family by a king so long ago they’ve forgotten it means anything odd.

PAGE 343

The artificial lights are being turned down for dramatic effect. The inhabitants of the domes are more than a little afraid of unfiltered radiation, and most of them have never seen a real twilight. This theme-park imitation is spectacular to them.

PAGE 344

The basic idea for this story lodged in my head long before I had a baby of my own. I started drawing this story a good bit before I knew I was going to have one. I knew amazingly little about kids.

I was taken to task for depicting this baby being put to sleep face down. Current dogma states that all babies must be put to sleep face up. Parenting scripture is largely ruled by pseudoscience and sheer terror.

At any rate, when my kid arrived, he would not go to sleep in any other position, and that was that. Thirty years ago, parenting scripture had it that babies in hospital nurseries were always to be put to bed face down. Back and forth swings the pendulum.

But I really knew zilch about how big Johnny Lockrum should be, or what he’d be capable of doing, or even how old he should be. I blame any peculiarities on his clan. They’re all like that. Yeah. Besides, a kid his age can roll over by himself. And shouldn’t need to be rocked to sleep. And so on . . .

PAGES 345 AND 346

Out the back and into the woods and gone. The baron is fairly popular in the areas surrounding Manavelin. Lord Lockrum has built a lot of schools, hospitals, and other civic assets, including trade schools to teach locals to craft furniture, glass, porcelain, and a lot of other things that he needs.

These craft halls are nominally part of Manavelin’s industry, though craftsmen who don’t live on

Manavelin's grounds are not bondservants. Lord Lockrum has armed guards, and he did a lot of political fancy dancing to get them. They don't patrol the fence. That thickly treed space around the house might as well be a moat to most city people, unused to trees and undergrowth. Or so it was thought.

These Ascians live in yurts. A yurt can be a very complex structure, but these are basically tepees that sit up on walls. When your beasts of burden are so enormous, you can make a lot of big things out of leather.

Lohena's yurt has been shielded but not walled off since she started having Braxton Hicks contractions. That's a preliminary to labor that can go on sometimes for a couple months. They don't hurt; the "ow" is a real contraction.

CASTING THE HOUNDS

PAGE 351

The police in most of the city are mostly composed of Medawars, one of the eight big clans. Medawars may be hardheaded and bad tempered, but they're competent cops. Way down here at ground level, the cops are mostly "other." These cops are all of a lesser clan. One would think that, being closer to street life, they'd know their territory intimately, but this territory is hard to know that well—too many different people with different loyalties and different agendas. The cops never know when they're helping to solve a crime, or being manipulated to help commit one.

PAGE 352

Many big estates have "construct" servants like the dog-headed footman at the bottom of the page. Many rich people collect these factory-grown life forms as if they were dolls. The baron inherited this pair of Dobermanns from an aged aunt, but they are the only two in his staff.

PAGE 353

Kidnapping for ransom is a business in Anvard—a family business to some of the lesser clans. It's so common that there are a tangle of laws defining "ethical" kidnapping versus "brutal" kidnapping. Some lawmakers argue that the "ethical" guidelines constitute a legal form of kidnapping, and should be codified and detailed in the interests of the public.

A "manichord" is a piano whose strings have been wrapped to deaden their sound.

PAGE 356

The Ascian religion is an ecstatic one. The adherents are each considered to "belong" to one of a pantheon, and it's not uncommon for Ascians to ask each other whose "angel" they have, the same way we might ask each other which astrological sign we were born under. Face and body tattoos indicate affiliation with a particular god. A child's personality indicates which god they should devote themselves to as they grow.

Each individual can be "possessed" by the spirit he or she belongs to, and while possessed speaks with the voice of the god and is accepted as an incarnation of that god, however temporary.

Priests and priestesses can be possessed by any of the gods. These women are calling to a goddess called Eta-Ele, who is a very dark, dangerous woman, one who cares only for children and their well-being. If Eta-Ele denounces a parent or caretaker, shit happens. But Eta-Ele isn't the one who has chosen to possess the priestesses. Instead they get Ket, first among many manifestations of death. Ket doesn't speak.

PAGE 359

It's more than a little pretentious for Station 665 to call itself a "pirate" station, since they broadcast across the kudzu. Since the kudzu pick up and bounce signals indiscriminately, and since nobody owns them, it's hardly piracy to use them. It's just Corporate 3dgy.

Hard to say whether Lohena would really have given birth nude or not. Stress can be chilly.

PAGE 360

I haven't done much in this story to explain what a Finder is. In Jaeger's case, it means he's an aboriginal detective, good at scouting and playing bloodhound, noticing details. He's Smithson's opposite number.

PAGE 361

Footmen are meant not only to be useful but ornamental, adding glamour to the house. A tall, good-looking footman was paid more than a short, funny-looking one. Scent trailing, taking place outside the house, would definitely be considered downstairs work, no matter how difficult it is to master.

PAGE 362

Stanya, first housemaid. Housemaids change a lot of linen.

I don't think I did enough to make clear the Ascians' outsider status. Officially, they're foreign tradesmen. They're allowed to enter the city for short periods of time to buy and sell. Some winter inside the dome to escape bad weather. But they are not citizens, and have very few legal rights. An Ascian who gets into a fight with a city dweller is far better off hiding than going through the legal system.

PAGE 364

There's quite a lot of city underneath Manavelin. Subway tubes, sewer lines, trucking lanes, all that kind of thing. The layer directly under the grounds was filled with dirt for the trees' root systems, which still isn't enough room for trees exposed to wind and winter. It's a garden which needs a lot of tending.

PAGE 365

It's very still in Manavelin. The air does move, but there is no breeze. It feels like a sound stage.

One of the big things that confounds forensic work in Anvard is the extensive reliance of doctors upon genetic manipulation. There was a tidbit in the July '05 *National Geographic* that I wish I'd known when I was writing this: a boy with leukemia received stem-cell therapy to replace his blood-producing bone cells. It was a great success and the docs have great confidence in his recovery, but his cell donor was female. His new red blood cells will carry two X chromosomes. His mother said that if he ever committed a crime and left blood behind, "They'll be looking for a girl."

PAGE 366

I didn't do extensive research on the Lindbergh kidnapping. I took only the broad strokes: isolated celebrity; great public furor; the terrible fact that the baby was dead the same night he was taken, dropped from a ladder. I have no opinions about what really happened. This event was one of the great disillusionments that created the twentieth century.

PAGE 368

For some reason I hardly ever show the children's faces. I don't think it's completely clear that Lohena has given birth to twins.

PAGE 373

"Quetzal" is a common but not well-liked food animal, rather like a lizard with two pairs of wings. Easy to breed, easy to feed, and greasy as hell. Not a biped, but lumped in with other

things you have to pull feathers off of. Order wings from a street vendor, and quetzal's most likely what you'll get, along with a good heaping of single-celled inadvertent additives.

Each clan strives for genetic conformity. The well-established clans have largely achieved this, to the degree that they can publish their own specialized child-development manuals. Identical twins raised apart are often more alike than twins raised together. There's a range of personality definition that each clan expects of its members, and they're right more often than not.

LOCKRUMS

PAGE 378

The hyperbole in the notes sent by the kidnapper—assurances that the baby was eating twice what was suggested by his mother, being cared for by two women—these details did come from the Lindbergh kidnapping. So did the kidnapper's repeated comments about burning, though no one was sure whether he meant that he might be executed, or whether he would go to hell upon his death.

PAGE 384

The book on Lady Ethany's lap is *Dear Mili*, a rediscovered Grimm's fairy tale illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Sendak was four when the Lindbergh kidnapping took place, and its effect on him has been powerful.

PAGE 385

I didn't show how flattened the newborn babies' skulls would be from passing through the pelvis, because I didn't know. They didn't compress much because, being twins, they're small. Yeah. That's it.

PAGE 389

"BH" does not stand for "Bruno Hauptmann." Really.

PAGE 393

"I'm not eating this one alone." Jaeger is also a sin-eater, or spiritual scapegoat, in the Ascian religion. He left home as a boy to follow an Ascian progress, and sin-eater is one of the few social positions available to a camp follower whom nobody sees fit to adopt.

PAGE 394

It can't be easy to leave a murder victim lying where he or she is found. The knowledge that minute examination of the scene will help law enforcement to find the perpetrator must make it a bit easier.

PAGE 395

This rhyme comes from Joel Chandler Harris's collection, sung by a sapsucker dancing on a branch over Br'er Rabbit's head.

TWO BY TWO**PAGE 397**

I probably gave short shrift to the baron by not going into the nature of his celebrity in more detail. There are quite a few no-man's lands outside the cities in which informal states of war exist. The young George Lockrum, his twin brother Tom, his parents, and other family members were traveling back to Anvard through one of these zones. Their transport broke down, and they were taken to a "field hospital."

The doctors in these hospitals have free rein to conduct human experimentation. They are run by the people of the city of Javecek, who are horribly obsessive on the subject of health. This idea derives from the grotesque "twin studies" performed by Josef Mengele in Reich concentration camps during WWII. But make no mistake: what he was doing was torture under the guise of research.

What the Javecek doctors are doing is not more ethical: they are conducting human research on non-Javecek citizens. Unlike Mengele, they make systematic advances, and their medicine is the most sophisticated in this world, but this does not excuse their capturing, experimenting upon, and often killing foreign travelers.

Nor does it excuse the rich and privileged of other cities that skirmish with the field hospitals one year and travel to Javecek for the latest drugs and therapies the next. George Lockrum became a hero as a child for escaping and saving so many other kids in doing so, but his celebrity has never been simple for him.

The Javecek doctors will take anyone they can get—Ascians and other nomads are common captives—but clan people, given that their genes are well mapped, are at a premium. George's group was composed almost entirely of twins. They were kept as controls while their brothers and sisters were having things done to them.

PAGE 402

Lord Lewis is another Gildale. George became part of his household, and Lord Lewis oversaw his further upbringing and education.

PAGE 404

The coffee-shop proprietor is one of George Lockrum's refugees. All of the survivors live close to Manavelin, and he's done his best to settle them.

PAGE 405

Rick the beat cop's appearance is based upon Philip Jackson's portrayal of Inspector Japp in the television adaptation of Agatha Christie's Poirot books. A subbranch of Medawar police, as seen briefly in my sixth book *Mystery Date*, have his long hound dog looks.

PAGE 406

Evidence isn't much good if you don't know where it was found or by whom.

PAGE 407

Tepees glow in the dark. These Ascians aren't allowed to light fires on the Manavelin grounds, but they have been supplied with artificial lights. They flicker like candle flames and are very picturesque, much to the Ascians' annoyance.

PAGE 408

Clinging to the shriver's staff is a quetzal, which, apart from being a trash bird, is the symbol of his profession. Birds fly, snakes crawl upon the ground, so the quetzal, which does both, encompasses both earthly and spiritual life. Absolution of sin is only a small part of this priest's duties.

PAGE 413

The kids are divining with a pile of small bones. They're doing this right outside the tent of a woman who's just given birth. That's too much juice for a bunch of ten-year-olds, and they got themselves into all kinds of trouble.

PAGE 416

Aaaand it's David Suchet in full Poirot drag, but this time he's playing John Dearhart, Manavelin's major-domo. Floresca Desusa, the head cook, is another of the baron's refugees, and she is the link to the others who have been passing Smithsonian evidence collected by Jaeger. He thought it would be easier to accept if it came from citizens in good standing.

PAGE 418

Lohena's elaborate hairdo is a new-mom ritual thing.

BERGTATTE**PAGE 421**

The term might be translated as "spirited away," but more literally it means "taken into the mountain," as by evil spirits.

PAGE 424

These are the servants' stairs, which are the

quick but creepy way to most of the living quarters, from basement to attic.

Nen's string map isn't so odd. Polynesian fishermen made maps of the sea with bamboo and strands twisted from coconut husks.

PAGE 426

I always wondered how women could bleed to death in childbirth. I understood once I realized that the placenta is a vascular organ, like a heart. It has a beat of its own that can be heard before the baby's. It's supposed to loosen and come away from the uterine wall after birth, all the contractions having dislodged it, like a stamp stuck to a deflated balloon. Sometimes it doesn't. Women still die this way.

PAGE 429

The servants leave notes to each other in their corridors. Mostly the major-domo and housekeeper don't catch them.

PAGE 430

The word "vetter" means "people," but implies "odd people" or "strangers" or even "spints."

PAGE 431

Traffic in the lower city is often segregated according to time of day. Trucks and other shipping vehicles need their own rush hour to make deliveries, and certain times of day are set aside.

PAGE 435

For a moment, Smithson expected to see his own cops dog piled onto the guy Jaeger pointed out, and was disoriented not to see them. Smithson believes him; he just doesn't trust him.

PAGE 436

Female staff in the olden days caught having sex with footmen or guests or boyfriends were dismissed without a hearing, and had few prospects besides workhouses and prostitution. Society in Anvard is very stratified, but the people do believe in birth control. It's easier to not get caught.

PAGE 438

This is a baby monitor. I keep forgetting to make these things clear. I really should have come up with an appropriate lullabye for Ethany to be singing. The pickup mike of the monitor is in the lower right of the bottom panel.

PAGE 442

Lohena is offering the baroness her daughter.

ORACLE

PAGE 445

Easy enough for an oracle that's the hub of ancient life, like the Pythia, to make political machinations based on the fact that everybody and their kid brother who could scrape up a decent offering came to ask her their burning questions.

FLOTSAM

PAGES 447–449

Oh no, no no no. I'm not getting any further into this one. There's plenty more here, but it'll have to wait for another book.

PAGE 450

Wish I'd been able to come up with more ways to show that on the other side of this dome are the undersides of buildings. Drippy pipes, elevator cables, lofted building foundations, all that. Probably should have taken the time to show it.

PAGE 451

All the party guests just kept on partyin' all through this. Even Manavelin isn't big enough to accommodate so many guests over such a long time, and the social register had a field day trying to figure out who had to sleep on the floor and who didn't—which is, of course, a deep, dark, reputation-damaging secret, so someone's going to make a lot of money off of it.

PAGE 452

To strict Ascians, Jaeger's role as sin-eater makes him evil by default. There are different branches of this religion that view sin-eaters in different contexts.

PAGE 453

It is a mark of the esteem in which he holds her that the baron visits his head cook IN THE KITCHEN. Normally, only his young children would have the freedom to go downstairs as well as upstairs. As master of the house, he meets with her once a day to give her instructions and hear anything she needs to tell him, but that's mostly accounting and meal planning. Not the place for revelations.

PAGE 455

"Set adrift on the river in a basket" is a theme repeated often in the ancient world. Since it's always part of a story in which the child is found and raised to be a hero, one always assumes that such children are going to be found. It's a big river.

Ethany isn't so much eating as cutting her food into smaller and smaller pieces. She's a bit obsessive.

PAGE 457

Clan people inspect their young people for acceptability to clan membership. Records are examined, interviews are held, and a sort of beauty pageant is held. Kids that don't make the cut are called culls. They usually become servants.

The clans do permit some variations within the group, and do sometimes work towards particular traits by accepting members that don't conform perfectly, but you'll rarely hear them admit it. As far as the outside world is concerned, they've always been this way. What way? THIS way.

PAGE 459

Yes, there are several forms of slavery that are legal in Anvard. I'll get to it.

PAGE 460

The Ascian nobility and Jahousa, representing the clergy, do their drinking inside Manavelin, in one of the gentlemen's retiring rooms. In spite of his upbringing, the baron's tastes are a bit low; he has a pub re-created in his gentlemen's rooms; bedrooms are small. The quality of the workmanship was his first concern; or rather, his first once you got off the grounds and into the house.

Lydia sleeps in the same room as Flor. Quite unusual for a scullion, especially since she has to get up earlier.

PAGE 461

The "killing nurse" was a common but unspoken feature of Victorian life.

Is Lydia literally Flor's daughter? No, not biologically.

PAGE 465

Ascians do, of course, all kinds of things to conserve resources they know won't last, to preserve necessities. But they can't prevent droughts or bad hunting years, and nomads go hungry more often than settled farmers.

Limiting families is difficult and chancy. No one wants to see children starve, and the hunter who gets the last scraps to keep his strength up in hopes that he'll get something big tomorrow knows his children are watching him eat. That's why the men eat separately, except at feasts.

Limiting girl children is one way of keeping the next generation from being even larger than the one before. This is a pattern and an attitude seen often in areas prone to starvation.

PAGE 466

Yes, yes, there is a way of bringing the dead back to life, if certain circumstances can be met. Why didn't the baron simply have his baby revived? Put down that monkey's paw. It's not pretty. There is brain damage, and that's not the least of it. A body doesn't get dead and then come back just as it was before.

PAGE 467

As I said before, there are several forms of slavery practiced in Anvard, some legal, some not. Legal forms include bonded servitude, indenture, and chattel. Chattel slavery is what we think of when we think of slavery. The chattel slave is a piece of property with no rights, to be done with as his or her master sees fit. What Robert Gipson is being offered is a way to save his life, but at the expense of his freedom—ALL of his freedoms, for as long as his master wishes. In his particular case, he may not be permitted to earn his freedom, and his master can still have him put to death by petitioning the slave judges.

One wonders who would buy a slave with this history.

PAGES 468 AND 469

So, yes, that's Jaeger's daughter. When I have more, you'll know.

FIVE CRAZY WOMEN

CHAPTER ONE: BEWARE OF DOG

PAGE 475

Chapter head image inspired by George Platt Lynes's *Portrait of Reginald Beane*, 1938. Lynes was a brilliant composer of light and shadow, and a connoisseur of erotic male beauty. Pen-and-ink version of the cover used for *Finder* issue #30, in which *Beware of Dog* first appeared.

PAGE 477

Nothin' against Elvis Presley as such, but the original lyrics of *Hound Dog* make more sense. The song was written for a woman, R&B singer Big Mama Thornton.

The public phone he's using isn't connected to its base by a wire, but by a chain. The earpiece connects to the transmitter wirelessly. Only the desperately poor use these things, and no one expects privacy from the lowest of the low ends.

PAGE 478

Mattie is using the far more common information interface, one mounted into her skull behind the ear. The button only activates or deactivates the phone; the rest is all done by bone conduction of the voice. Yes, you can still roll over on your phone button and make a random phone call, like bumping your cell phone's redial button, if you forget to tell your phone to shut off.

PAGE 479

Having activated their skull-jack phones, holding their right hands in the "phone" gesture keeps the call live. They don't have little receivers built into their hands; it's all brain.

There are "day" neighborhoods in Anvard in which the sun lamps never shut off, and "night" neighborhoods where there are none to begin with. None of them are open to the sky. The most expensive property runs under the surface of the city's dome, which, though opaque, transmits several useful wavelengths of solar radiation, and is the closest thing to living in natural light available to city dwellers.

People are so cut off from the cycle of day and night that they hardly know what they are. Born a night person? Move to a dark town. Get depressed without enough sun? Save up and move out. Just buy good blackout curtains and keep your sleep drugs handy.

A truly twenty-four-hour city.

Simone's earrings are teeny-tiny bars of soap-on-a-rope.

PAGE 480

The name "Jannie" came from Shirley Jackson's elder daughter. The same woman who wrote *The Haunting of Hill House* and "The Lottery" also wrote funny home-life stories for ladies' magazines. The odd connections between events and details that ended up both in her humor pieces and her ghost stories are striking and occasionally unnerving. For a fuller appreciation of this amazing writer, go find *Raising Demons* and *Life Among the Savages*.

Jaeger really is a very good cook. Fancy cooking is a courtship ritual among the nomadic Ascians, who can rip out amazingly sophisticated food over dung fires. There's a big difference between "men's" cooking and women's, more so even than the old "women are cooks, men are chefs." One of these days I'll get around to showing Jaeger talking some semiurbanized Ascians into opening a restaurant.

PAGE 481

There's a radio speaker built into the cell tower that hosts this phone. Noisy, noisy town.

PAGE 482

Anvard is a city of towns stacked on top and halfway through each other. In some areas people live in pubs and smoke a lot. In others that kind of thing will get you forced into rehab for the good of your neighbors.

PAGE 483

The "pub cat" here is a little bipedal dinosaur, as seen in panel 3.

Vary of *Mystery Date* and her fellow Artists and health specialists tend to use terms like "monosexual." Other people still use terms like "gay" or "straight," limited though they may be.

PAGE 484

What has Jaeger got? What has his friend got? Those are all for later, later stories.

PAGES 485-488

Ah, Frankie the Ho. He knows that most of the men he goes after won't be able to get it up while drunk enough not to kick his ass, but Frankie keeps hope alive. His wife, a practical woman, can't understand why he doesn't try some experimental brain reloads that would reroute his fetish for public sex into a fetish for

getting the hell beat out of him. Whatever you do, she reasons, you should enjoy . . .

PAGE 489

This pub is in a tight neighborhood. The streets are never much better lit than this. There is no sky, only the undersides of other buildings. In a richer neighborhood, those undersides would be fancier and better maintained, architecturally integrated into one another. Spaces between buildings would be wider and more open. The lower the income bracket an area enjoys, the twistier and narrower the streets are, until they're too small for any but foot traffic. There are families who have bought contiguous properties in all directions, until their sets of interconnected houses extend every which way like tunnels through a termite mound. Only there can people pool together enough money to break down a few walls and ceilings to make a garden room, a space to breathe, installing full-spectrum lamps and hiring gardeners to make little islands of green in the depths of the city.

PAGE 491

Huldres are farmers. They live in giant combine harvesters, rolling around the hills outside the cities, mowing the grain that, according to them, grows wild. Other harvesters take issue with their methods. Huldres are pirate farmers.

PAGE 492

This is one of my many attempts to dig myself out of the crosshatching trenches: colored pencil on linen-finish paper. Only problem is, I have to do the word balloons on stick-down labels. Letter, cut out, stick down. Tedious work, and it limits what you want to do with balloon shapes, numbers of balloons per panel, and other tricks of the trade.

PAGE 493

Some people have to know they're in love before they have sex. They have to see if their mental furniture has been rearranged before they want to get physical. Jaeger's just the opposite; his mental furniture doesn't really get rearranged unless he has sex with someone.

PAGE 494

No, this is not me. Huh, don't I wish.

PAGE 496

I've never really been happy with this guy's design. He looks all Village People with the mustache, and just such a nonentity without it. Ah, well, years to go and many miles to cross; he'll come into his own in time.

PAGE 497

Damn, the perspective on panel 3 is wonky. I know how I did it, too; it was correct on the penciled panel, but I moved Jaeger down to fit more of the ceiling in. So his boots, in the foreground, look big enough for him to get both legs in one. Oops.

I got this notion of architecture being related to the female body from traditional Russian architecture. Those characteristic onion domes, apart from being great at shedding heavy snow, reflect the shape of the old woman's headdress, the tiara-like *kokoshnik*. Or *kokoshniks* reflect the shape of onion domes. Dunno which; it's probably a little of both.

PAGE 499

The "weird head" girls are people like the Huldres, who have horns and cows' ears, and the lionlike Nyima—humanoid people with animal characteristics.

Asciens are repulsed by body hair. They don't have much, and what they do have, they shave. Jaeger's hairiness really sets him apart from them.

PAGE 501

"Mauger" is Sicilian in origin. "Grazie" is of course an Italian word, but as far as I know it isn't an Italian name.

So it's just her.

PAGE 502

I did a short follow-up story between Jaeger and Grazie for an erotic anthology called *Smut Peddler*. It isn't in this collection because, though it was fun, it really didn't advance the story. There aren't any big song-and-dance numbers in *Finder*, either.

I've done three short smut pieces as of the date of this writing. I'll probably do more. Perhaps someday I'll have enough to print the *Finder* pillow book.

PAGE 503

Jaeger and his friend both come from the same company town. They were kids together.

The friend's name is Brom, okay? There. Brom is singing Devo. Devo is good.

INTERLUDE: BRIEF WAKE

PAGE 505

This is also a tight neighborhood. The blond in

the second panel has only three fingers on each hand. She is a construct. That's all for later too.

PAGE 506

"Chane" rhymes with "Jane." These are Ascians in the uneasy process of assimilation.

PAGE 507

This all has to do with the near-universal state of war that exists between roving bands of Ascians. Women do have to move from band to band to find a husband, and they do it in a variety of ways—some capture, some trade, some volunteer. They go seeking husbands from men who may have killed their brothers and fathers, and who may yet kill their blood kin. Lots of bad blood. But the kids have to be accepted, and this ritual is all about assimilation. All the hate and despair and vengefulness is supposed to be dumped on the sin-eater.

PAGES 508–509

The sin-eater's ritual as it was practiced in Appalachia had to do with the dead, and the mourners at the wake. The corpse was covered by its shroud, and food laid out on top of it.

The sin-eater could either come and eat only that which he could cram down in one sitting, or else had to stay until he had consumed all the food. In Britain the rituals used salt and bread, sometimes wine, and the sin-eater had to go straight to the nearest water to be purified. Ancient Jewish sin-eaters were animals, scapegoats, which had prayer scrolls tied around their necks and into their coats, and which were then driven away to fend for themselves in the wilderness.

Ascian sin-eaters perform a wide variety of rituals, up to and including executioner. In that capacity, the sin-eater uses a hammer.

CHAPTER TWO: SO

PAGE 511

This chapter first appeared as issue #38 of *Finder*, and was the last one sold as a single issue. The issues weren't losing money, but they weren't making much either, and sales on the issues had been stagnant for over a year. If the issues were meant to be advertising, then they weren't doing their job.

So the book went online after that. There have been plenty of kinks to work out, but in the long run this will be better. Chapters can be as long or as short as I want them to be, and, though the deadline for producing this graphic novel has made me bleed from the eyes, working straight through has been strangely satisfying.

Of course, so is *Rapture of the Deep*, or so I'm told.

I also wrote and penciled a seventeen-page story that was meant to serve as a bridge between *Beware of Dog* and this first part of *Five Crazy Women* that I had to cut for lack of time. It's done; it's just not inked. I'll do something with it eventually. I just simply could not have got it inked and still come out with the book on time. I slapped "Brief Wake" together to take its place.

Why did I need the interlude story in the first place? *Beware of Dog* was issue #30. *Five Crazy Women* began in issue #38. A lot of time and a whole other story, *The Rescuers*, happened in between. *Beware of Dog* was done as a standalone story, and that's fine, but it went a long time uncollected. I picked up its threads to do *FCW*, but I needed something to give the impression of time's passage. Not sure how well it worked. The longer story would have done that more effectively.

Jim Ottaviani said it best: "It's amazing how the front and back covers of a new book are exactly like a rock and a hard place."

PAGE 516

The line I cut from this page went "They never show me the crazy till it's too late to run away." Funny, but in retrospect it seemed to put a stop to the story's momentum.

Boy, it's just crazy to have the freedom to do things like that; when I was doing the issues it felt like a live performance. Couldn't go back and change things for the TPB. That's cheating.

PAGE 518

I had this daft idea that people wouldn't know who Jaeger was talking to if I just kept his face out of the way. It's so hard to get Jaeger to talk that it was important to keep his friend in the background as much as possible.

At this point Jaeger and his friend are sitting in a country store, long after hours. This kind of shop is found in dark neighborhoods, and serves a lot of purposes. This one sells whatever it can, and maintains an unofficial post office for people who can't send mail electronically.

"After hours." That means "closed." The shop was closed but the doors weren't locked, so they went in.

PAGE 519

Candy's actual name is in fact Candle. Her

mother was a pop musician, and got caught up in yet another wave of strange baby names.

The sandals she's wearing have no straps. They're just soles that adhere to your feet. Every once in a while a company will offer things like that, and they're always kind of intriguing as concepts and horrible in practice, so it was perfect for this character.

PAGE 520

Flirt flirt flirt and then look surprised when someone wants to go to bed with her. How many girls have I known who did this?

Oh yes, and Candy's front door lock is coin-operated. Yes, this is a really cheap neighborhood. It wants her thumbprint too, so it's not like anyone with a dime can get into her apartment.

PAGE 521

I really must get Jaeger out onto the plains one o' these days. Did I ever tell you about the time a group of Huldres sold him into slavery?
No?

PAGES 522–527

Food compulsions can be very strange. The uneaten cake is an obvious thing; she won't eat it but she has to have it in the house. The way she hides candy wrappers is a less obvious thing. She can't eat certain things in front of other people, and even in the privacy of her own home, she automatically hides the evidence—even though, after a few hundred wrappers, they aren't hidden at all.

She lives on sugar. Lots of eating-disordered women do. It's widely considered "safe" because it does not contain fat. Candy is obsessed with sugar. She dabs sweet extracts like vanilla and peppermint behind her ears in lieu of perfume.

PAGE 528

Not all women with eating disorders shy away from sex. Far from it. But this pull-close/push-away thing worked for Candy as a character.

Lucky for Jaeger; if he'd had sex with her, her part of this story would have been a lot longer and a lot uglier.

PAGE 529

Jaeger really is more comfortable on the floor. This has driven many a townie girlfriend half-nuts.

Where did the new cake come from, if Candy's kitchen is completely empty except for the box of candy hidden under the sink?

CHAPTER THREE: TALLY HO

PAGE 531

I chose that chapter title at the last minute. It captured the charging-in-chin-up-stout-fellow quality I wanted.

Well, and some more male-bonding snort-snort stuff. Tally them hos, boys. Make a list.

PAGE 534

Outside of town, Jaeger is a scavenger and a freelance fighter. In town, well, he's a scavenger and a freelance fighter. The rules change a bit and he loses track sometimes.

PAGE 535

There's a restaurant in San Diego called Buca di Beppo. Its walls are covered in odd photographs; the women's bathroom is decorated entirely in fifties foundation garments and hygiene pamphlets—Lysol, anyone? The men's is full of phalli and images of Vesuvius. Ask for the Pope room if you don't have a really large group.

One of my favorite images is one of two young priests lighting cigars, remarkably like the image in panel 4.

So this young priest catches Jaeger shaving in the holy-water font. I could not write the dialogue in this scene.

PAGE 536

I have no words to describe speed dating.

PAGE 537

I have no idea who any of these women are. I was just braindrooling. This page was done mostly to the soundtrack of *The Crying Game*.

PAGE 538

This is the first page I drew after having my second kid. Everything after this page was done between early March of '06 and mid-June. Don't go thinking, "Hey, that's three months. That's not so bad." Hahahaha.

No, there's an agonizingly slow spin-up period after I've been out of it for a while, not to mention all I had was an outline, no script.

Production of the story issue by issue has been a treadmill I find myself very happy to climb off

of. I took the time to write a full script for the rest of the book, and as a result I had time to edit.

PAGE 539

Inspired by Penn Jillette's rocketmouth spiel for Teller as seen on their show.

PAGE 540

Laaaa . . . and here's Genie. What can I say? She'll be back, if only in the Anvardian equivalent of the Darwin Awards.

PAGES 541–543

Gymnastics. Yes. Limber little thing. Impulse control? No.

PAGE 544

Haha, I'd originally planned to have Genie's little nudie pic in heavy shadow, but it turned out too cute to obscure. The heavy-shadow version just looked strange, what with those silly pigtails bobbing around in the dark.

PAGE 545

She made that headboard herself.

She's very good with her hands.

PAGE 546

Ta DAA. My sounding boards all told me to leave the poopin' part out. Genie's name, for those of you who don't have small kids, is a pun on a ghastly piece of modern baby equipment, the Diaper Genie. This is a trash can. Just a trash can. But it has an extra-long can liner that attaches to the lid. You dump a smelly diaper in through the hatch in the lid. You spin the lid. Smelly diaper is now encased in a twist of plastic garbage-can liner. Repeat until liner is full. Extract horrible turd link sausage and discard.

There is a cute, smiling, happy baby on the box. Really. Lots of parents have these things. Genie's relatively uncommon fetish pales in comparison with the prevalence of the Horrible Turd Link Sausage. Someday long after the asteroid hits and the radioactive cockroaches are excavating our landfills, the Turd Link Sausage will lend its name to our era.

My kids' diapers have cartoon characters printed on them. Winnie-the-Poo.

PAGE 547

Most of the crazy women have potential in future stories. I tend to think of established characters as face cards. People who've read previous

books will recognize them; they carry a certain amount of weight. The crazy five may be more like the seven of diamonds rather than queens or aces, but they might have their uses . . . but I don't know about Germaine. Maybe that's why Jaeger doesn't count her.

PAGE 548

I got more letters after having posted this page, with its "mutate" line, than I had received in years. Interesting.

PAGE 549

Don't ask me if Yekat counts or doesn't. I was writing a character in a haze of sleep starvation while actually in a state of sleep starvation myself. I think she counts. Why she's still a nice girl probably has to do with the fact that she still lives at home.

Her name is a variation on Catherine, of which there are hundreds. Popular saint.

PAGE 550

Several beds pushed together, with their legs held together with rope. You can still lose your keys, your glasses, and your Viagra down the cracks between mattresses, and have to send one of the kids under the bed to retrieve them.

PAGE 551

Well, I tried to indicate that the grandma was sort of bouncing around as the bed jiggled, but I'm not sure it came across.

PAGE 554

I definitely abbreviated that guy's bulk by turning his shoulder too far toward the viewer.

PAGE 556

He really got off pretty light.

PAGE 557

Here I'm depicting a reasonably advanced society, but they don't have collapsing gurneys for their ambulances. Yikes.

The medics are wearing full-body protective suits. Not much as armor goes, but they do protect them from a dull puncture like human teeth, from needle contamination, from splashing body fluids. They still need masks if things are really bad, of course.

And no, they should not be forcing down the head of a trauma victim in order to restrain him. But he's a pain in the ass when he's hurt.

One good thing about having small boys in the house: you've always got toy cars to use as models for street scenes.

PAGE 558

WRAB Pirate Television was a comic by the inimitable Matt Howarth, also creator of *Keif Llama*, *Savage Henry*, and *Those Annoying Post Bros*. If all the world had one ass, his boots would still be big enough to kick it.

Hey look, it's Vary. Hi, Vary. Vary was the star of my sixth book, *Mystery Date*.

By the time I drew this page, I'd been done with Grazie for three years. It was good to see her again.

PAGE 559

Grazie has two floating cameras, one keyed to stay on her face, one keyed to whatever she's looking at. She can jump transmission from one camera to the other with an eye-blink signal.

She still works at the pub; pirate TV doesn't necessarily pay.

I was watching the first season of *House, MD* while I was drawing this part. All the women seemed to have a phase of wearing low-cut frilly blouses under vests. Sort of . . . vulvar, if you ask me, but pretty.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TAIL FAIRY

PAGE 563

The house is made of brick, built the old-fashioned way, not a single layer of brick over a balloon stick frame, but actually three layers of brick deep. The stairs are so old, there's a dip worn into each tread. This house has been in the family for a long time.

The large portrait on the left is of Grazie as a girl. These portraits are generally made as gifts for the family when a child wins full membership into her clan. Grazie's portrait should be hanging in her family's gallery. She stole it, along with most of the framed pictures she has on her walls. Long story.

The girl on the far left has one blue eye and one brown, and has bleached the hair on the blue-eye side and dyed the hair on the brown-eye side. She and the Huldre in the center (girl with horns) are the only ones who look a little odd, but nearly every person in Grazie's house is someone she's interviewed.

No, she has not had sex with all of them.

PAGE 565

If I'd had brain cells to spare, I could have made better designs for Grazie's couch collection. She loves couches. Everything happens on couches.

PAGE 566

That looks like a skull on the bookshelf, but it is actually a carnival mask.

PAGE 567

The roads in that part of the business district are laid in old subway pits, so the curbs are a good three feet high. It's easy to fall in, especially during high foot-traffic times. Nobody likes it, but nobody wants to fix it.

The thing is not that Jaeger is lying to his friend, but that he's doing it so badly. With his big issues, the closest he can get to honesty is a very transparent lie. His friend knows this part of him very well.

PAGE 568

He doesn't heal instantly. His bones, for instance, stay soft for a good long time, and it would be easy to kill him when he's in this healing state.

PAGE 569

Grazie has a fascination with all kinds of sexual fetishes, but hurt/comfort is all hers. She once considered becoming a counselor, but realized she'd have to be nice to people she thinks need a good slap upside the head. So instead she does her little TV show and has an ever-flowing stream of oddballs in and out of her house.

PAGE 570

Fever. I had the highest fever of my life back in February this year ('06). I really needed to get to the bathroom, and I just plain could not get up. I just huddled under the blankets shivering and waiting for it to subside, and it wasn't.

Kind of interesting, actually.

PAGE 571

Panel 2. There's Genie. **Panel 3:** There's Linsey. **Panel 6:** Gavin is the squirrely guy from the speed-dating event.

The dialogue between Lin and Grazie comes from a dream sequence in *Cerebus: Church and State* Volume 1, which was the first graphic novel I ever bought. The sequence was called "Odd Transformations II" (the part of the dream that takes place after Cerebus gets up and pees for nearly four pages).

Dream sequences are generally used to jumble all the elements of the ongoing story together to reflect a turbulent moment in the plot, and the dreams in *Cerebus* are no exception, but other things seemed to be going on in them. This is part of a conversation between Astoria and the countess, or at best *Cerebus*'s mental images of them. *Cerebus* walks past them as if they aren't there, and their words hang in the air as if heard through a thin wall. I didn't refer back to the book to copy the exchange exactly, but rather used what I could remember.

Jaeger is rambling through Grazie's house like a ghost, sleeping in her living room, waking at odd hours and for short times, and these few lines from *Cerebus* have been stuck in my head for a long time. They seemed to serve the atmosphere of the page.

And there's Marcie. Hi, Marcie. Down, boys.

PAGE 572

For those of you who haven't read my first book, *Sin-Eater* [included in *Finder Library Volume 1—ed.*], Brigham Grosvenor was Jaeger's officer while he was a military man. These women are his wife Emma and his kids, Marcie, Rachel, and Lynne.

PAGE 573

That T-shirt is, of course, quite pink. He's just wearing whatever Grazie's got in her grab bag.

PAGE 574

As Grazie would say it, "There are a lot of kinks out there. Most of 'em, maybe they don't do much for me, but I can at least see how someone could be turned on by 'em. I had a wild time with a guy in a mole suit once. Once, dammit, don't look at me like that! Other fetishes . . . ho boy. Some of 'em I just cannot see. Not even with a microscope.

"Kinky's all right with me. Just no liars, no whiners, and no users."

PAGES 575–576

This bit came from a very ordinary-sounding guy who called in to a radio interview of a doctor specializing in posttraumatic stress syndrome. He said he was in Vietnam, sure, but in spite of that never thought he had any real psychological fallout from his experiences there. He described this scene, standing outside the door of a party, truculent guest being asked to leave, and his own sudden realization that he could have—would have—killed that man if he'd really tried to go back into the house.

This guy was not a drifter, not homeless, not one of the lost. He thought he was just an ordinary guy, and he was stunned at this mechanical compulsion to kill. He'd never had it in civilian life. It really opened his eyes, he said, to what PTSD can really do.

It might just be one of those strange floating impulses that hit us all from time to time. Alan Moore described looking down at the top of his mother's head as she tied his shoes—he was very young—and thinking of taking a knife off the nearby table and killing her. Why? No reason. He wasn't angry with her. He wasn't abused. And for him there was no compulsion to act, and he wasn't even fully aware of the thought until later in his life—though he didn't forget the incident.

There's a lot of weird stuff in our heads. Jaeger was briefly caught in a compulsion that could have triggered him to act. Could have. Might have. Didn't. So now he doesn't know.

There are no plants growing in Grazie's front garden. Those are all fake. She has some potted herbs under the lamps in the kitchen. And there's Yekat. Song lyrics are from Buckcherry.

PAGE 577

Baby Broken Bones appears courtesy of Scott Roberts, creator of *Patty Cake and Friends*. He really has a handle on little kids. He does the occasional fake ad, and Baby Broken Bones was one.

It's not so far fetched. When I was very young there was a baby doll that got diaper rash that you could "cure." It was taken off the market because you gave it the diaper rash by putting a pill into the doll's bottle. Dolls supposedly model behavior, let's not forget . . .

And here's Candy. Why are all these randomly met girls in Grazie's house? And why doesn't Jaeger ask this question? Well, Grazie knows Linsey. The rest, well—think of Grazie's house as like a well-attended message board. People you'd never expect drift in all the time.

And here's Germaine. Hi, Germaine. Bye, Germaine. At certain angles she does resemble Jaeger's dad's last girlfriend very closely.

PAGE 578

Jaeger's aunt never had this conversation with him. She wasn't much for storytelling.

PAGE 580

"Yeah, what's a little hematemeses among friends?" Just keep putting it off; you can take it . . .

PAGE 581

"Nevaeh" is "Heaven" spelled backwards.

PAGE 583

In a very real way, Grazie's house is a website. For many people, the virtual environment is far more useful and desirable than the real one. Some physical locations are designed to bridge the gap. Cameras transmit images of the rooms to the web; and holostages make the visitors visible to the real world. Some people create simple digital puppets to go visiting with, avatars that pretty closely resemble themselves—though few can resist the urge to tinker. Others bust out with role-playing-game characters, or knockoffs of actors and celebrities. Not many houses have such large holostages; that was just Grazie's uncle's big thing.

PAGE 586

We're so used to characters in fiction never really getting hurt, their accidents and injuries having very few physical consequences. I resisted mightily the urge to include in this story line more details on the genetic plagues that have swept various cities, including Anvard, in recent times. But, considering that these plagues can do things like make people fuse together like conjoined twins, I thought better of it . . . This was originally supposed to be a nice fluffy comedy.

Jaeger does have his quick heal. But it isn't magic and it does have its backwash.

PAGE 589

The other reason he put off doing this for so long is that Grazie really hates cutters. She'd recently had a run of them in her house, and had to work hard to get them to stop hanging around. Of course, he cuts for a different reason, but, well. Keep reading.

PAGE 592

Pirate TV broadcasters can turn your TV on when you don't want it on. They control the vertical.

PAGE 595

Yes, well, these are two guys who've known each other a long time. There's a difference between a gay bashing and two friends smack talking.

COVER GALLERY**PAGE 648**

This house kept getting bigger as the story went on. I hadn't pictured it as much bigger than your old country manor house originally, but it kept getting more and more like a giant termite mound.

PAGE 649

Here, Jaeger is wearing the traditional feathered cloak of an Ascian holy man, but his staff is broken. The traditional staff has a crosspiece at the top that serves as a perch for a quetzal.

The educated eye can tell from viewing the staves of urban Ascian holy men what branch of the religion they profess. Some have done away with the live animal and use carved representations. Some do without the animal entirely and just carry the staff with its perch. Others carry no staff but wear a tiny, caduceus-like pendant, as Christians would wear a crucifix.

PAGE 650

Someone's always watching, but that doesn't mean all the pieces get put together. Jaeger was so overwrought about the baron's son that he didn't know anything about Lohena and her misfortunes.

PAGE 651

It occurs to me at this late date that the patchwork cover might have been better if I'd made some attempt to make it resemble a body—head, arms, legs, etc. Oh well.

PAGE 652

This composition was taken from a *Scientific American* photo of young girls in pink school dresses walking in front of the ancient wall of Great Zimbabwe (March 2005, vol. 15, number 1, special edition). For years archaeologists asserted that this city had to be the work of ancient Europeans because the native Africans were "culturally barren."

PAGE 653

Last, this composition is taken from the cloister of the Abbey Church of St. Peter, photographed by Norman Walsh.

PAGES 663 AND 664

Well, the only one of the women on the front who hasn't appeared before is Xini, the Ascian girl in the yellow tutu. The girls in the crazy bouquet are Marcie, Chane, Auntie, Rachel, Grazie, Candy, Yekat, Genie, Linsey, and Germaine.

And that's that. The next book will revisit the oldest Grosvenor sister, Rachel, and is titled *Voice* [available now from Dark Horse Books!—ed.].

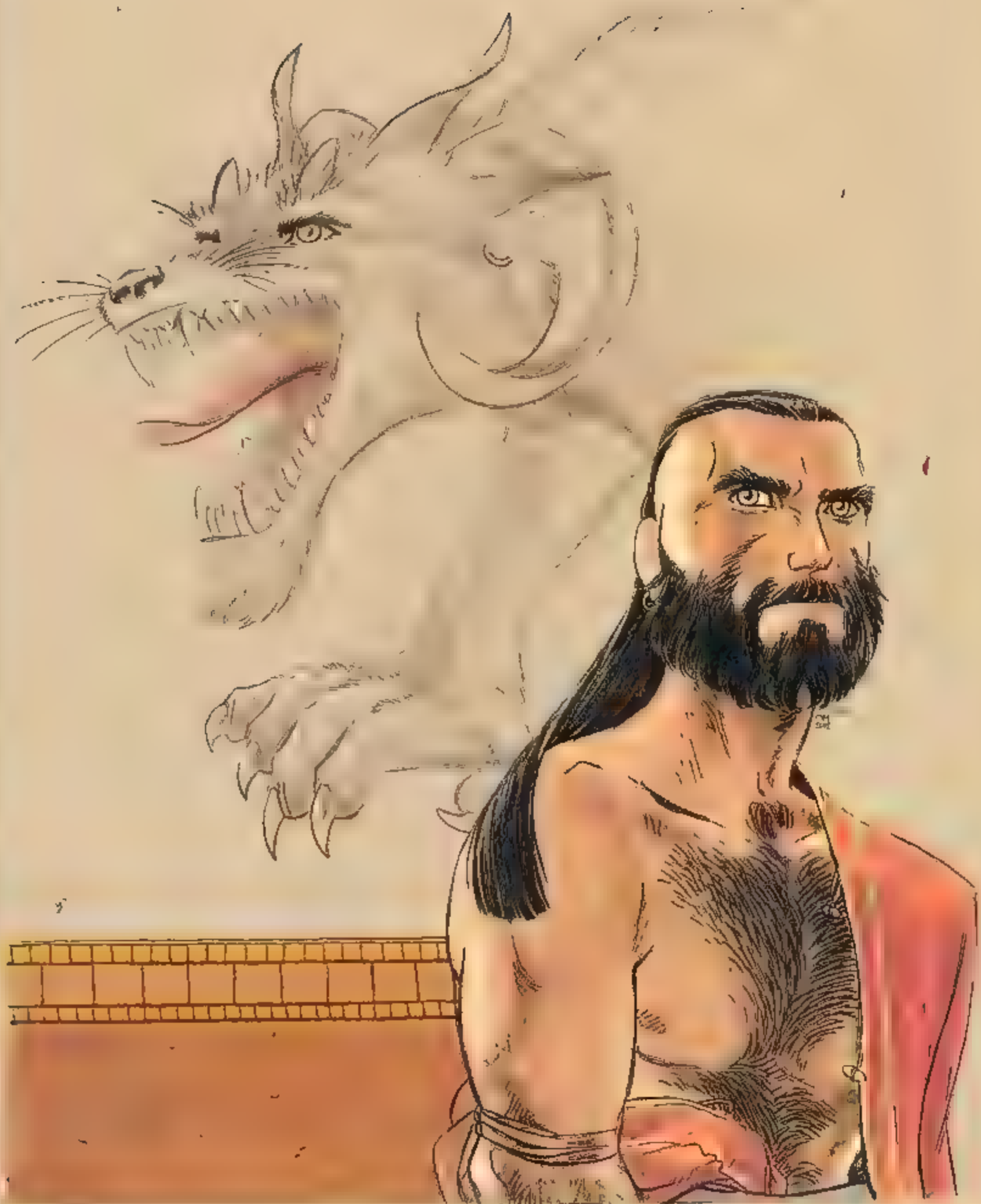
"Good night, and good luck."

—Edward R. Murrow

COVER GALLERY



















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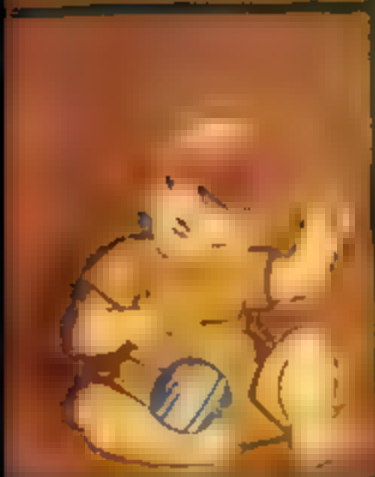
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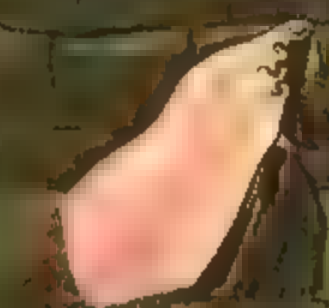
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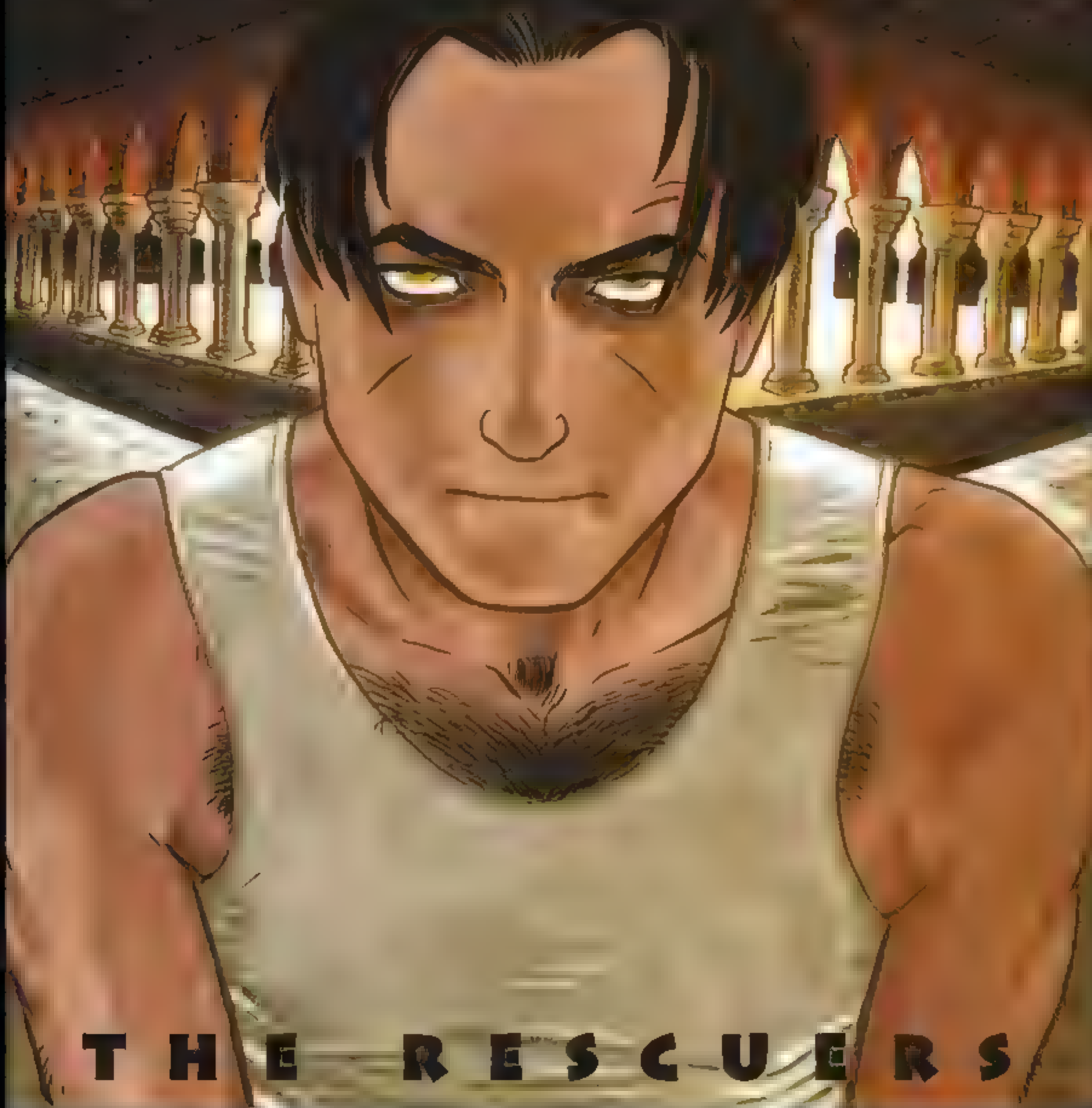
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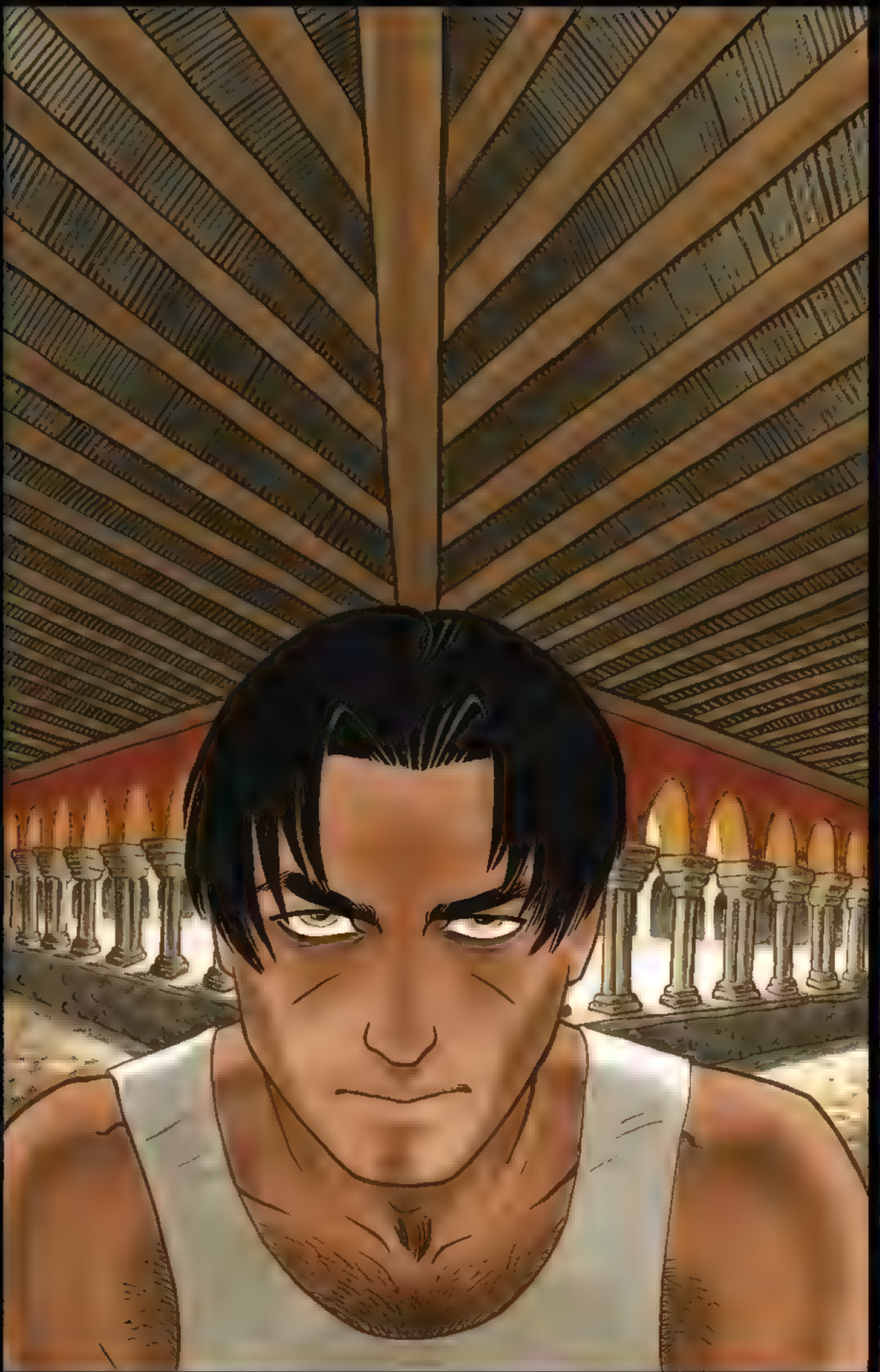
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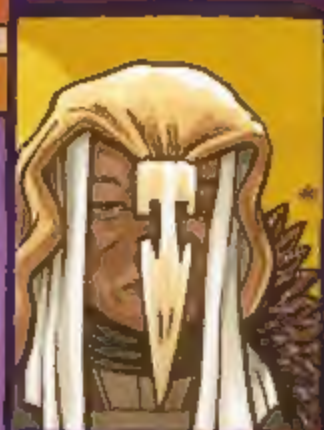
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